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THE GIRL BY THE ROADSIDE





“I think, if you had not come—if somebody had not found me, I should have gone on.”

THE GIRL BY THE ROADSIDE

BY
VARICK VANARDY

AUTHOR OF "ALIAS THE NIGHT WIND," "THE RETURN OF
THE NIGHT WIND," ETC.

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THE GIRL BY THE ROADSIDE

THE GIRL BY THE ROADSIDE

CHAPTER I

THE GIRL BY THE ROADSIDE

PENDLETON applied the brakes, brought the car to a protesting and jarring stop, bent forward over the steering wheel, and stared, frankly.

The girl, as frankly, stared back at him, although the suggestion of a smile twitched at the corners of her mouth; and her greeting was not less amazing than her presence.

"I am so glad that you came," she said. It sounded almost as if she had expected him, and had been waiting in that expectation.

She was sitting on the sodden, water-soaked bank beside the road. The tempest was at its height—it had been so, in fact, for the last three hours, and it bade fair to continue in the same manner, indefinitely. Water was dripping upon her from the projecting boughs of the shagbark hickory over her head, and torrents of it were driven into her face and all over her slender and unprotected figure from

the black and ominous clouds that rushed past the place just above the treetops.

She was, herself, sodden and bedraggled—soaked, Boone Pendleton had no doubt—to the skin. She had drawn her riding habit as closely as possible around her and tucked the skirt under her as a slightly additional protection. Her feet and ankles showed to the tops of her high-laced russet shoes, which in their turn rested in a puddle of maroon-colored water among the leaves. Her jaunty hat, rakishly at an angle above her red-brown hair, dripped a steady stream at front and rear. Drops glistened at the end of her nose and at the point of her chin, and fell, unheeded. Her gloves were soaked and discolored, and looked as if they pinched her small hands. A riding crop was lying on the wet leaves at her feet. She was, in a word, as wet as wet could be; she could not have been wetter if she had been lifted by the nape of the neck and soused to the point of complete immersion beneath the cascade, now swollen to torrential volume, that howled among the boulders in the mountain stream behind her.

Even at that she was no wetter than he was.

It is absurd to describe a young woman as attractive, under such conditions, but, all the same, Boone Pendleton was not unaware of that dimpling ghost of a smile that she bestowed upon him, nor of the hidden laughter in her eyes, nor of her regu-

lar features, and attractive figure, in its close-fitting riding habit.

She made no attempt to rise when he stopped the car, and he thought it almost as amazing that she should remain seated, so calmly regarding him, as that he should have discovered her there at all.

"What in the world——" he began, and stopped. It was impossible to express in one question the several things he wanted to ask.

The smile that had been hovering at the corners of the girl's mouth materialized, although, truth to tell, it was rather forlorn and wistful—and it had a pleading quality in it that fascinated him because of its expression of sheer helplessness. And he noticed that she winced a little, as if she were in pain.

He sprang from the bucket-seat under the steering wheel, and alighted ankle-deep in red-clay mud that was more like crimson paint than anything else; sticky, and heavy, and glue-like; but he toiled through it, lifting pounds of it with each foot as he forced his way forward until he stood on the bank beside her.

"I am not enraptured by the scenery," she said, smiling up at him, but making no effort to rise, "and if I had had any choice in the matter I should not have selected this particular spot at which to spend a quiet afternoon. Nevertheless——" She stopped abruptly, lowered her eyes and turned her head away from him; but not so soon that he did

not see unbidden tears come into her eyes behind the long black lashes.

"Have you been here long?" he asked her.

She nodded, still with her face turned from him. But then, with resolution, she looked into his eyes again, smiling bravely through her tears.

"I am silly to have been so frightened," she said, with an evident effort to speak calmly. "But I was beginning to be terrified. I was in a panic when you appeared. It will be dark before very long, and—and I think, if you had not come—if somebody had not found me, I should have gone mad."

"Tell me," Pendleton asked, bending slightly nearer to her, "have you hurt yourself?"

"Yes," she replied. "My right ankle. I cannot bear my weight on it, to say nothing of walking. And I have not dared to loosen my shoe."

"You are soaked through and through," he remarked, pityingly. "I am sorry——"

"So are you," she interrupted him. "And you are covered with red mud. I wonder—— Do you think that you could help me to get into your car?" There was so much genuine doubt expressed in her manner rather than in the question itself, that Pendleton laughed aloud.

"I dare say that we can manage that," he said. "You don't look so very heavy, and I am reasonably strong."

Then, unaccountably, she thought, he fell silent—and remained so for so long a time that presently, with a touch of excusable impatience, she demanded:

“Well?”

“Pardon me,” he rejoined, hastily, and flushing. “I was trying to determine in my own mind what is best to be done—er—with you. You see——” he hesitated.

“There must be a house, with people living in it, somewhere in this wild region; is there not?” she asked him. “And you can take me to it, in your car, can you not?”

“Yes,” he replied slowly, answering the first half of her question. “There is a house less than a mile from here. But there isn’t anybody living in it, and there has not been for a whole year. You see——” Again he hesitated.

“I think, at least, that you might help me into your car,” she said with spirit.

“Good Lord! So I should!”

Pendleton bent down and gathered her in his arms, lifted her as if she had been a child instead of a grown woman of a hundred and thirty pounds or so, and before she realized what he was doing was wading through the red mud with her.

She uttered a little cry of pain as he lifted her from the ground, then clung to him with one arm

around his neck; and thus he carried her to the opposite side of the roadster and deposited her gently in the open bucket-seat.

For a moment after that he thought that she had fainted, she sat so still, with her eyes closed; but she opened them almost at once and tried to smile up at him.

"How long had you been sitting there in the rain when I found you?" he asked, standing beside her, almost knee-deep in the clay mud.

"Ever since it began—since before it began," she murmured faintly, for she had, in fact, very nearly lost consciousness.

"Great Scott!" Pendleton exclaimed. "That was three—no, nearly four hours ago. Do you mean to say that you have been seated there in the storm all of that time?"

She nodded. "Since an hour or more before it began," she told him quietly. "There was no sign of a storm, as far as I was aware of it, when my horse picked up a stone in one of his shoes and I got down from the saddle to relieve him of it. He was helpless. He could not put his left fore-foot to the ground, with that stone wedged fast in his shoe. And I worked for a long time trying to dislodge it. I hammered at it with other stones, and worked over it, without success. But I must have loosened it without knowing it, for when I left him to go in search of a larger stone to use as a ham-

mer, and when I was bending over with my back toward him, searching for one, there came a crash of thunder directly over my head—a terrible one—so that I cried out in alarm, although I am not afraid of such things.”

“It frightened the horse, too, I suppose,” Pendleton said. “And you had loosened the stone so that when he jumped it fell out of the shoe—and he ran away and left you. Was that the way of it?”

“Yes; only that I ran after him, and frightened him the more by calling frantically after him to stop. I was lost. I had been lost an hour or more when my horse picked up the stone and I dismounted to remove it. That crash of thunder was the first intimation I had of an approaching storm. I had no idea where I was, and the mere thought that I might not be able to catch my horse again filled me with terror. But I ran on and on for a long time after the horse had disappeared and I could no longer hear his hoofbeats ahead of me. I had the hope that he might have stopped somewhere beside the road and that I would come upon him.”

“How did you injure your ankle?”

“It happened after I had been running and walking along the road for a considerable time. It grew suddenly dark. I looked upward, between the tree tops, and discovered that heavy black clouds were gathering thickly. That frightened me anew. The thought of being caught in the forest on this lonely

mountain road, in a storm, and alone, was terrifying. I began to run; and then—I must have stepped on a loose stone. I fell. When I tried to rise I could not do it. I made several efforts, and failed. Finally—I believe I must have fainted and become unconscious for a time—I dragged myself to the bank, where you found me.”

“Before it began to rain?”

“Oh, it did not rain for a long time after that; but it got very dark—almost like night. I tried several times to walk, to struggle on; but it was impossible. Each time that I attempted it I became so faint that I had to sit down again. Then the rain came down—in enormous drops at first; then, for a while, almost incessant lightning and frightful crashes of thunder. I—I did not dare to move. It seemed to me that the bolts of lightning struck the trees and rocks everywhere around me, and—oh! I wish you would not make me tell you any more about it now, please. And—please, please take me somewhere. It will soon be dark.”

“Will you tell me your name? Mine is Pendleton—Boone Pendleton.”

“Thank you. I am Miss Judith Ralston. And now won’t you please——”

“Just one moment more, Miss Ralston, before we try to make a start.”

She looked up at him in questioning surprise.

“There is something that I must tell to you first,”

he went on. "There is a house, as I have said, somewhat less than a mile from where we are now. It has not been lived in since more than a year ago; but it is furnished, and it is comfortable. I know that, because it belongs to me. I was on my way to it when I found you here, and—this is the point, Miss Ralston—I was hoping, almost against hope, that I would be able to get there before my gasoline became entirely exhausted. Do you realize the predicament, Miss Ralston?"

She stared at him without replying, and he added, speaking rapidly:

"I am a brute to keep you here talking when you are soaking wet and in pain, but I had to make you understand that exact situation. There is not another house within eight miles of us, and I very much doubt if there is sufficient gasoline in the tank to drive the car all of the way to my own place. I almost doubt if I can start it again. Still—I think—perhaps—I can do *that*."

"But—what shall we do? We must get somewhere, Mr. Pendleton. And I cannot walk a step."

"Oh"—Boone laughed reassuringly—"I can get you to my own house all right. When the car 'goes dead' on us I'll carry you the rest of the way. But the point is this: It is the only place where I can take you. And there isn't anybody there. And the nearest house to it is eight miles away. And night is almost upon us. It will be as dark as a

stack of black cats in another half-hour. Do—do you understand?”

“Ye-es.” She nodded, half frightened, yet not afraid, peering at him closely under the long lashes that shaded her eyes, while the rain continued to beat down upon them with unceasing violence. “There—there is nothing else to do, is there?”

“No.”

“Perhaps you have a store of gasoline there, and we can——” She stopped, for he was shaking his head.

“No,” he said, “and even if I had—if the tank was full at this moment—it would do no good, Miss Ralston.”

“Why not?”

“No automobile that was ever made could negotiate this road a hundred yards beyond the gate where we turn toward my house—where it practically comes to an end. This is a high-powered car, but I wasn’t sure, even just before I found you, that I could make my own gateway, even if the gasoline held out. It is practically down to the hubs now in this sticky, oily clay. And that is not the worst of it.”

“What is the worst, please?” she asked faintly.

“This mountain road, after such a storm as this one, will become utterly impassable for any sort of a vehicle—yes, even for horses under saddle—for days to come. If I take you to my hunting lodge—

for that is what it is, Miss Ralston—you will be practically a prisoner there for two or three or even four days to come; and if this storm continues, as it bids fair to do, it may be a week before you can get away. I—please forgive me—but I felt that it was my duty to make you understand all of this before—before I took you there.”

“But,” she said in so low a tone that he barely heard her, “I cannot stay here. I am cold. My teeth want to chatter in spite of me. I am hungry and frightened and terrified. And it is getting dark. Please try to start the car.”

Silently he climbed into the seat beside her. He pressed the button of the starter. The engine began to hum. He manipulated the levers, let in the clutch, and then applied all the power he had. The car lurched forward half its own length—and stopped. The wheels spun weakly for a moment in their slippery beds of oily clay, and they, too, came to a stop. The powerful roadster was helpless. It could go no farther that night.

CHAPTER II

A PERPLEXING SITUATION

PENDLETON stared blankly ahead of him for a moment. The girl beside him sat very still, and, beyond the fact that he was conscious that she shivered and that her teeth chattered ever so slightly, she made neither motion nor sound.

But she glanced shyly and furtively toward him and saw that his jaws were rigid with determination.

"The car won't budge," he told her calmly after a moment. "There isn't anything that is quite so difficult for automobile tires as this particular brand of red clay when the right proportion of water has soaked into it. The car will have to remain exactly where it is until—until some other time," he added with a kindly smile that was half bitter and half amused.

"What shall we do?" she asked faintly.

"We will have to go on without it; that's all."

"But how? I know that I cannot walk, and——"

"I must carry you."

"But can you? I am so heavy; and my water-

soaked garments make me heavier; and it is more than a mile—you told me."

"Yes; about that. But it is only about half a mile to the gate. After that we will be past the worst of it; that is, out of this sea of red paint—for that is what the clay of this county turns into when it is rained on. There is a fairly good path from the gate to the lodge."

"Do you think that you can carry me as far—as that?" she asked him doubtfully.

"Of course I can—and will—Miss Ralston. But——" He stopped, eyeing her quizzically.

"But what, Mr. Pendleton?"

"Well, we will have to play the game of 'Make-believe,' you know."

"I don't understand."

"We will make believe that we're just a boy and a girl who have been out playing together and have got caught in the rain—brother and sister, if you like. You must get on my back, and put your arms around my neck and hold tight; and—er—get your legs around me, over my hips, and cling fast to me for all you're worth. Just like a couple of kids. You understand?"

She nodded.

"For I shall probably do some floundering and slipping in the mud. It's as slippery as grease and as sticky as glue—both."

"Suppose"—she was endeavoring very bravely to

smile, but he could see the evidence of pain in her eyes, and he knew that she was trying with all her might to keep up her courage.

There was one thing, however, that he could not know: that she had been, since very early that morning, without food, and that even then she had taken only a very little—two glasses of milk and a piece of cold corn bread.

“Come on,” he said, once more climbing out from under the steering wheel and toiling ankle-deep in the mud around to her side of the car. “Stand up now—but do not put any of your weight upon your injured foot. That’s right. Bite on the bullet, sister. I’ll call you that until we get to the house.”

“You are very good to me—bro-brother,” she faltered, obeying him and attempting another smile.

“Nonsense! Suppose that you were as strong as an ox—that’s what the other chaps always said that I was at college—and that the conditions were reversed; you would carry me on your back, wouldn’t you? Surest thing you know.”

“I—I cannot quite imagine my doing that,” she murmured.

“Now, I will turn around, with my back toward you,” he said with a genial smile, and did so. “Put your arms around my neck. That’s right, only a little tighter—close up under my chin; that’s it.

Don't be afraid of me; I won't eat you; can't, you know, with my back toward you. Now, get your head down a little alongside of mine."

Her cheek was like ice when it touched his, but instantly he felt that it burned against him as the hot young blood rushed into her face with the unwonted contact.

"Stand very still now for a moment," he told her. "I've got to reach around behind you and lift you with my arms, and then you must wind yourself around me until you get a perfectly good purchase. That's the idea. Good! Tighter than that. Tighter yet. That's it! Bully for you, sister. Now we'll start. Are you ready?"

"Ye-es," falteringly. Her cheek that touched his own was suddenly cold again. "Do you think—are you sure—that you won't fall down?"

"Indeed I am not; but, if I should stumble and fall——"

"Yes?"

"You are to let go your hold and slide off of me at once—and take mighty good care not to land on that game foot of yours. See? Now we're off."

"It will be dark very soon, now, won't it?" she asked, as he made the start.

"Uh-huh," he grunted in reply; and added: "That is, before very long."

"Before we get to your—to the lodge—where you are to take me?"

"I shouldn't wonder."

"Can you find your way, if it should get very dark indeed? You won't get lost, as I was, will you?"

"Lost? Here? Not a bit of it. Now—you do all of the talking for a while, and don't ask questions that I've got to answer. I've got to keep my wits about me—and my breath, too."

Pendleton had to hold to the middle of the road in the very worst and thickest of the going, because of the bushes and briars that lined the banks at either side; and the road itself, like all roads in that part of Virginia, had never, since history began, been "made." It was simply a fenced-off thoroughfare which had never in its existence been turnpiked, or even scraped and convexed for travel; and two or three centuries of utility had worn it down into a very decided concave condition, so that when the torrential rains of that season fell upon it, it became straightway converted into a river of crimson mud of about the consistency of warm molasses.

He slipped, and floundered, and skated, and slid, and otherwise forged ahead; no euphony of expression could have dignified his progress as walking.

He stumbled, and plunged forward, often within an ace of falling, and as often recovering himself just in time to avoid the calamity, and each time

that such a thing happened he could feel that the arms of the girl tightened around his neck, that she clung to him the tighter, that often she winced with the pains that shot through her injured ankle.

Once, after he had carried her quite a distance, they came to a huge boulder at the side of the road, and he stopped, and backed his burden against it, to rest for a time.

But he would not release his hold upon her, nor permit her to relax hers.

"I was looking for this rock," Pendleton told her after he had partly recovered his breath. "We are about half way to the gate, now."

"Do you think that you can get there—to the gate, I mean—before dark?" she asked him.

"I hope so; yes, I think so. Ready? We're off."

Again he plodded onward.

But darkness was gathering very fast indeed. There were times when he could not see the roadway—or, rather, the waterway—at his feet.

The rain still fell in torrents; not for an instant had it slackened. But both of the castaways had long since forgotten that water was wet. Pendleton remembered only that there would be a fairly decent pathway for him to follow after he arrived at the gate, and that the worst of his toil would be over.

And Judith?

She was striving with all the fortitude she possessed to retain her consciousness, which many times threatened to desert her altogether.

The pain in her ankle had become excruciatingly acute, and every slipping lurch that Pendleton made under her sent shooting darts of agony into every fiber of her being. She was faint, also, from lack of food; and the accumulated terrors of her long hours of helpless waiting beside the road were beginning to have their effect upon her; and night was upon them in earnest.

It came very suddenly when it did come; came within another low gathering of densely black clouds hanging just above the treetops, and with a cloudburst of rain that seemed to come down in chunks; the most copious of shower-baths was a joke beside it.

Pendleton stumbled on, unseeingly, because the night had become so black that he could not see; but he got his bearings from the shadows of the treetops ahead of him, and presently turned sharply to the right and began a slight ascent—and slipped—and plunged forward—and fell prone upon his face.

At the same instant, also, Judith's hold around his neck relaxed. He felt that she was slipping off of his back.

Somehow he caught and held her, half turning as he fell; and then, as he struggled slowly to his

feet, he found that she had fainted dead away; that she had entirely lost consciousness.

But the gate was right there before him. He could not see it, but he knew where he was; so he lifted her in his arms and staggered with her up the slope to firmer footing, and put her down, with her face upturned to the falling rain, while he seated himself beside her to rest.

One hundred and thirty pounds, more or less, is something of a burden even for an unusually strong man to carry a considerable distance under such conditions, and Pendleton confessed to himself that he was pretty nearly all in.

Yet, in the darkness, he smiled down upon the dainty face that he could not see; for he knew that the rest of the way would be comparatively easy. The footing would be good, at least.

So he waited and rested, hoping that consciousness would return to her.

But it did not, and so, at last, he started on again, carrying her across one of his shoulders as he would have done with a bag of meal; and somehow—he never quite knew how—he toiled at last up the steps to the wide veranda that skirted the front of his hunting lodge.

He had to put her down on the smooth hard boards while he searched for his key, and went inside, and foraged for matches—and he thanked his stars that he had been methodical when he had

closed the lodge in anticipation of being absent a year.

He knew how and where to find everything that he needed, and very soon he had lighted a lamp in each of the four rooms of the bungalow, for that is what it really was.

Fortunately the month was August, and the night was a warm one, and the rain itself was warm, so that neither of them had suffered in that respect. Pendleton was, in fact, decidedly overheated by his exertions; but he started a blaze in the fireplace, nevertheless, and drew up a couch before it.

Then he brought her inside, and as he put her down she opened her eyes.

"That's right," he said to her, cheerfully. "Wake up. You fell asleep out there in the rain."

"Did I faint away?" she asked him, weakly, trying to smile.

"Not a bit of it, sister. You were tired out, and you went to sleep. And we are all right now; as right as two bugs in a rug. I'm going to fix you something hot and strong, while you lie here and look at the fire and pull yourself together. And then I will scrape up something to eat. I've got lots of good things here, in tin cans, and in jars; and there is bacon, and ham, and—oh, lots of things."

He left her, and presently returned with something in a glass that steamed.

"I made it quite weak," he told her; and left her a second time.

She could hear him opening and closing doors, pulling out drawers and pushing them shut again; and after a time, just as she had swallowed the last of the contents of the tumbler, he returned.

"Look here, sister," he said, with an affectation of brusqueness.

"Yes?" she replied, smiling up at him.

"There has got to be some more 'make-believe' in this business of ours."

She did not understand, and showed it in her eyes, which—as he discovered then and there—were exceedingly remarkable and unusual eyes, indeed.

"I don't believe that two people were ever quite so wet as we are; do you?" he said.

"I don't think I could be any wetter," she replied.

"Well—you see—you've got to make believe that you're a man; see? That is to say, you must get those wet clothes off you, right away. I have not"—he went on rapidly, and turning his eyes toward the open fire—"a single article of feminine apparel in the place, but there is any quantity of the other kind—my kind, you know—and if you don't get yourself out of those wet clothes—Well, you've got to do it, that's all. So I'm going to shove this couch, with you on it, into that

other room, close to the heap of things that I have piled on chairs for you to select from. And there is a knife to cut the lacings of your shoe if you can't get it off any other way; and there is arnica, and towels, and water, and everything that you will need, and a big bathrobe to wrap around you after you are dressed in trousers and jacket; and—Here you go.”

Without more ado, and although Judith protested, he pushed the couch with her on it across the floor and into the adjoining room.

“Get busy, now,” he directed, “and while you are doing that I’ll get something to eat. Honestly, I think you will feel more at ease in masculine attire than—than—well, anyhow, than you do in those wet things. If you want anything, shout.”

Then he went out and closed the door after him, grinning at the puddles of water that were everywhere about, where he had trod, and where the couch had stood, before the fireplace; and he made a strange remark, half in an undertone, to himself, as he passed through that room into another one beyond it. It was:

“I wonder if that girl was dropped down there beside the road, in the rain, to show me how to solve my problem? It certainly does look that way to me.”

CHAPTER III

THE WORLD OF MAKE-BELIEVE

It was almost an hour later when Pendleton rapped gently upon the door of the room where he had left Judith. During that time he had changed into dry clothing himself, and he had made coffee, and fried some bacon and potatoes, and opened canned things, until he had prepared a sumptuous and inviting meal.

"Come," she called out to him in reply.

Judith occupied a Morris chair over in one corner of the room. Her cheeks reminded him of the riot of roses that so nearly smothered one entire side of the bungalow in the month of June, and her eyes were like stars, shining upon him with an odd mixture of mirth and mischief and self-consciousness, and with just a touch of helpless dismay; and he did the only thing that he could have done to render the situation easier for her, when he stopped at the threshold and burst into a hearty and joyous peal of laughter.

At the first instant she resented it; then she joined in with it.

"Isn't it perfectly terrible!" Judith exclaimed at last, breathlessly. "It is—it is beyond imagination—the whole situation."

"It's exquisite," he replied. "How's your ankle?"

"It is beyond words, thank you. It is swollen to twice its natural size, and it is as black as—as the night, outside. I cannot touch my foot to the floor without suffering agony. I'm—I'm utterly and entirely helpless. And"—she blushed furiously again—"I never was so shocked in my life."

"Oh, you will soon get over that—sister. Don't forget that we are now living together in the World of Make-Believe."

"N—no; I'll try not to. You are very kind. I—I must look like—like—I don't know what."

"You do—if that is a source of satisfaction to you," Pendleton replied, laughing aloud once more. "Which is the worse—sister? The ankle, or the consciousness of your utterly bewitching and fascinating attire?"

"The latter, if you must know, and I think you are—I don't think that you ought to speak of it."

"Nonsense. I am getting you accustomed to it. Now—do you smell anything?"

"I should say!"

"Are you hungry?"

"I am ravenous."

"Good!" He stepped quickly forward without

a word of his intention, gathered her in his arms and carried her, feebly protesting that he might at least bring her food to her, into the dining room, and deposited her safely on a chair at the table.

She was enveloped from head to foot in his own huge bathrobe, the sleeves of which she had turned back nearly to her elbows; and even at that, her smooth white hands and tapering fingers barely showed themselves. She had put on one of his silk negligée shirts—probably outside of other things which were also his property—and had enlisted a scarf and a stick-pin to her uses, so that where the bathrobe fell open at the neck she looked quite mannish.

A spirit of mischief had impelled her to part her hair at the side—she had managed, somehow, partly to dry it, although it was still wet enough—and had twisted the great wealth of it in a coil at the back of her shapely head.

“I have got on a pair of your trousers,” she told him blushing when he had taken the chair opposite her. “I did not suppose that things could be made so enormously big and still fit anybody that’s human. I could have wrapped them around me twice, and they are much too long at both ends; and your slippers—thank goodness one of them is not too large for comfort—and—”

She stopped. He was again convulsed with laughter.

"Have some of this bacon," he said, passing it across the table to her. "Eat your fill of it, if you can. There is a bully good fire in the kitchen—it is fifty feet away from the house, but there is a covered passage to it, thank heaven!—and as soon as we've done eating, and the bacon-smoke is out of the way, I'll carry your things out there and hang 'em up to dry."

"But—" she began expostulatively, and stopped, confused, blushing more furiously than ever.

"The 'World of Make-Believe,'" he warned her quickly: "They've got to be dried, haven't they, so that we can iron them and press them and do whatever else is necessary to do to them in the morning before you put them on again? We're just a couple of kids that got lost in the woods; and—I say! That reminds me."

"Well—brother?" The blushes still glowed in her cheeks; she held her eyes downcast for the moment. Truly, this was the most amazing, the most incomprehensible, the one impossible situation that a girl could ever dream of.

Pendleton studied her in silence while her eyes were averted.

He had known all along that she was utterly charming, but it had not occurred to him until that moment that she was so genuinely beautiful. He had caught the chiming sweetness of her voice, even down there by the roadside, when she told him

that she was glad he had come, but there had not been quite the music in it then that sang in it now. He had noticed her remarkably long and drooping lashes even when the raindrops glistened on her nose and chin, but it had not occurred to him that her eyes were quite so glorious, and starry, and fascinating, and—and—everything.

He forgot what he had been on the point of saying—until she raised them, and looked into his own, expectantly.

“I have not asked you anything about yourself—yet,” Pendleton said, again attacking the food on his plate. “I know your name, and that is enough—for the present; for all time, if you prefer it that way. You can tell me the rest—if you want to—when you get good and ready. But—this is the point: Do you know what you are up against, right now?”

“I don’t know what you mean,” she replied, soberly. “What am I up against?”

“This, little long-lost sister: It is raining outside, harder than ever. Down here in this region, sometimes, we have revised and amplified editions of the deluge, and this tempest looks to me like one of them that is going to be unabridged.”

“Well?”

“That means that the roads will be rendered utterly impossible, impassable, and all the rest of it, for days to come. It means that you will be a

prisoner here, in this bungalow, alone with me, to-morrow, and the next day, and the day after that, and—maybe—for more days after that, too. It means that you cannot get away from here if you try; that nobody will come near the place because nobody can get to it; and that I could not go away and leave you alone, even if I tried to, and even if you were not helpless to take care of yourself, for the very simple reason that no human being could do it until the rain has ceased, and much of the water has run off or soaked away. There are rivers on two sides of us—one of them is three miles away, and the other one is four—that come together ten or twelve miles below here; and a few miles in the opposite direction, beyond the hills at the back of the bungalow, there is a swamp that is, by this time, ten feet under water. Both of the rivers I have named have overflowed their banks long before this, and if this rain keeps up for twenty-four hours—it is likely to do it for three or four days; I have known it to do that very thing in the past—we will be, until the water subsides, literally on an island about two or three miles square. And, except for three or four ‘triflin’ nigger’ cabins with their occupants—who have probably skipped out before this—there is not another human being than ourselves to be found on the aforesaid island.”

Judith sat very still, looking straight into Pen-

dleton's eyes, while he explained the conditions by which they were surrounded. Then, when he had finished, she replied, quietly, and in a tone of conviction that sent a thrill of inexplicable joy through him:

"I am not afraid—brother—to stay here alone, with you."

"Thank God for that! Thank you," he said, soberly.

"There is plenty of food to eat, isn't there?"

"Yes; for a dozen more like us—for a month, or several of them. I keep the place well stocked."

"And I—I won't be—a burden on you?"

"A burden? I wish I could find a way to tell you how mighty glad I am that you are here with me, if only—if only—" He stopped.

"We won't think about that part of it," she told him, quietly, "for the very good reason that it cannot be helped. We are here. It is impossible for us to go away. We must remain as we are. We will, as you have suggested, live in a world of make-believe. It is because of no fault of our own that this has happened; and I—so far as I am personally concerned—" she hesitated.

"Yes?" he suggested. "Please go on. So far as you are personally concerned—what?"

"I am glad of it," she announced, in the same quiet tone.

A flame of joy leaped into Pendleton's eyes, but was quickly subdued.

"You do not understand," she said, quickly. "If I could believe that Fate, or Destiny, or whatever one may choose to call it, was concerned in my poor little affairs—"

"Call it a beneficent providence," he interrupted.

"Very well; in that case I should be under the conviction that a beneficent providence dropped the stone that my horse's shoe picked up, and sent the crash of thunder that scared him into running away from me."

"You mean—will you tell me what you do mean, please?"

"I hardly know myself. I told you that I was lost. I was. But I had been hoping that I would get lost—so that nobody would ever find me again. It seems that I have very nearly done that. I was riding alone, because I wished to get away from people. I was unhappy; I paid no heed to which way my horse took me. I intended to return, of course—because there was nothing else that I could do; but I hated the thought of it—of going back to—to all that I had left behind me."

"And now, that you are here—?"

"I have just told you that I am glad that I am here. I am. I am glad that I was lost; glad that my horse picked up a stone in his shoe; glad that he ran away from me; glad that I was four or five

hours in untold misery; glad that I twisted my ankle, and sat, in agony, for hours, in the drenching rain; glad that you found me and brought me here; glad that the rain continues and makes a prisoner of me so that I cannot get away, if I would. I am glad of it all; unspeakably glad."

Pendleton stared at Judith in mingled delight and consternation.

How was he to take her? How was he to understand her?

"But, your people—those whom you left behind you when you started out to ride," he protested, feebly. "They will think that you are lost in the forests and mountains, in this terrible storm. Your horse will find its way back—horses usually do that—and they will be frightened. They will conclude that you have been thrown from the saddle, and injured. They will think that you are—"

"Dead," she finished for him when he stopped. "So be it. Let them. I hope they may think so."

"But, Jud—, I beg your pardon. I like the name. It fits you. I have been saying it over to myself while I prepared this meal."

"Then do not hesitate to use it when you speak to me. We are thrown together too intimately to stand on useless ceremonies."

"Then, in that case, shall it be Boone, and Judith, between us, henceforth?" Pendleton asked, flushing with pleasure.

"Yes—if you like; and if we are to make-believe, as brother and sister."

"Thank you again," he said; and for a time after that both were silent. Then:

"Do you care to tell me anything about the reasons for the things you have just said?" he asked her.

"No, please. Not now," she replied, quickly, with a sudden lift of her gaze to his. "To-morrow, perhaps; or the day after—or the day after that one. I don't know—yet. But some day, perhaps."

"As you will—Judith. You are very tired, aren't you?"

"Yes; and—I don't like to confess it, but, really, my ankle pains me dreadfully; and my foot, too."

"You must retire at once. That room will be yours as long as you will occupy it. I will take your clothing into the kitchen to dry, and then I will carry you back to the Morris chair. You can manage—after that—somehow—I suppose?"

"Oh, yes."

"Do you think—" He stopped, appalled by what he had been on the point of suggesting, but she looked at him so frankly that he went on with it, after her inquiring:

"Well? Do I think—what, brother Boone?"

"Do you think—or, rather don't you think that if you should put your foot into some hot water for a while, and that then if I should bandage it

tightly—I am quite an expert hand at it, I assure you—perhaps it would ease the pain somewhat, and, and—and that it might be better to-morrow morning?”

Judith looked straight into his eyes and smiled, as she replied, slowly, and with the little, elusive dimples twitching at the corners of her mouth:

“What a great big overgrown boy my brother Boone is, to be sure. Are you afraid of your long-lost sister Judith, now that you have found her, and carried her more than a mile through the mud and rain, with her arms around your neck, and her wet cheek pressing against yours?”

“No,” he replied in a low tone, but with a sudden twitching at his heartstrings, “I am only afraid lest I might—unconsciously, and unintentionally—say something, or do something that—that would—that—”

“That would give offense?” she finished for him. “I am quite sure that you will not, Boone; else you would have done so before now.”

Then he lifted her in his arms, and Judith clung to him while he carried her into the other room and put her down safely and gently in the Morris chair; and he felt as if he walked on air while he did it, and that she weighed no more than a feather in his encircling arms.

Boone Pendleton was suddenly convinced that he had found the solution of his problem.

CHAPTER IV

THE GREATEST THING IN THE WORLD

BOONE was not a false prophet; the storm did not abate.

It continued with unceasing violence throughout the following day, and the next one after it. At noon of the third day the clouds scattered for a time, and the rain almost stopped; but it began to fall again with its old vigor as the hours lengthened, and all through the night that followed the mad gale hurled its furious onslaughts against the bungalow, and the clouds of heaven seemed to have opened to release all the stored-up, sun-drawn moisture of centuries.

Judith, still unable to bear an ounce of weight upon her injured foot and ankle, sat in the Morris chair at one of the wide front windows throughout those days of waiting.

They were peaceful days.

Boone and Judith talked much about things in general. They read books; sometimes he read aloud to her; often she read to him; occasionally they read in silence, each to himself. They played

cards and chess. They worked out puzzles and anagrams. They created new games. He dug his forgotten guitar of college days out of a closet, tuned it, and sang fraternity songs to her; and on the third day she asked him to play a certain accompaniment, and she sang to him—and he fell into a reverie under the spell of her enrapturing voice and forgot all about the instrument he was playing.

He waited upon her every wish. He carried her to and from the table, at meal time. Their names came glibly enough to each other's tongues. They laughed together, merrily, and related stories and anecdotes—and the time flew; oh, how it did fly! Boone began to wish that the rain might continue forever, without ceasing.

During the first day of their imprisonment he fashioned out a pair of crutches for her from some material that he found in the woodshed; they were crude affairs, but they were serviceable, and she could hobble about on them when the notion took her.

But not once did Judith refer again to that conversation of the first evening, and Boone asked her no questions.

Beyond the fact that she had told him her name, he was no wiser concerning her, at the close of their fourth day together, than he had been when he found her seated on the rain-soaked bank beside the road, and carried her to his bungalow.

But he told her all about himself—of everything that he could recall that might interest her, and she listened with rapt attention at such times, manifesting an interest that pleased him greatly.

There were times when he wondered why she did not choose to be quite as frank with him, but when he did think about it, it was never with resentment. Her position, under the compulsory arrangement, was radically different from his, and sometimes he surmised that her lack of frankness concerning her past life might be due to a wish to get away from him, when the time should come, in such a manner as to leave him with no knowledge whatsoever of whence she had come, or whither she might be going.

Their association was indeed strange during those days of cloud and storm without, and sunshine and peace and calm content within.

They were oddly intimate, yet strangely distant, with a reserve that was as inexplicable as it was indefinable. They kept up the comedy of Make-Believe, in their actions, their voices, and in the words that were actually spoken—but not at all in the quick, unbidden, unanticipated glances that shot from eye to eye between them from time to time; not when chance or accident brought their fingers into unexpected contact, or when—as Boone always insisted upon doing—he lifted her from her chair and carried her into the dining room.

The "silent voices" whispered audibly in the hearts of both at such times. Pulses throbbed uncannily; nerves tingled rapturously; blood rushed through vein and artery tumultuously; hearts throbbed madly—and in unison.

And both of them knew it; and denied it; and tried to still it all—and hoped and prayed that it might continue, on and on, forever.

Boone did not attempt to deny to himself that he loved Judith. He accepted the fact gladly, and hugged it to his soul with amazement and wonder, and unbounded gladness and never-ending joy because it was so. He whispered it to himself in the silent watches of the night, offering up unworded prayers of thanksgiving that it was true; and he told himself many, many times, that Love had come to him and claimed him in that very instant when he had found her seated beside the road, and had brought his car to a sudden stop at the sight of her.

When they sat together in the wide front window gazing out upon the storm, sometimes talking, but oftener silent, and communing only in their thoughts—at such times, when all of Boone's great heart went out to Judith in the love that he dared not put into words, he somehow knew that *she* knew, as well as if he had spoken.

He knew that she knew, and that she did not resent; and because she offered no protest, either

in her manner or speech, or in the glances of her eyes, he began at last to believe that Love had found her heart-throbs, as well as his own.

The fourth, the fifth, the sixth day came and passed, just as the others that had preceded them had come and gone.

In the afternoon of the fifth day the rain ceased. In the forenoon of the sixth Boone sallied forth in his wading-boots, used for trout-fishing, and returned after nearly five hours of absence, to report that at least two or three more days must elapse before there could be any hope of finding a way out of their predicament—and he noticed, or thought that he did, that Judith seemed rather glad than otherwise, that the time of their possible departure was still postponed; rather disappointed than otherwise because the end of their isolation was so nearly at hand.

“I went down to have a look at the car,” he told her. “You ought to see it. Words fail me.”

“Will you ever be able to use it again?” Judith asked him.

“Oh, yes. Gasoline, and oil, and elbow-grease are all that it needs, and I have a plentiful supply of the last two. Also, I will get a supply of the first one as soon as it is possible.”

“How?”

“Oh, I hunted up one of those ‘triflin’ niggers’ I told you about—he has got a cabin back of us, on

the hill, and was not driven out—and I gave him some money, with a promise of as much more when he got back here with two gallons of gasoline. He will find a way out, and a way back again with the stuff at the first opportunity, you may be sure.”

“When?”

“Oh, in a day or so. The day after to-morrow, probably—or the next one after that.”

“Are you in such a hurry to get away from here, Boone?” Judith asked him, averting her face.

He caught his breath. He tried to still the sudden beating of his heart. He succeeded, but only by a great effort, in holding himself well in hand. Then he replied, looking upon her although her eyes were still turned away:

“Yes, Judith—for your sake, I am. For myself—” He stopped.

“For yourself—?” she asked, softly.

“For myself, I wish that it might go on and on and on, forever, just as it is—No, not *just* as it is; but with only us two—with only you, and me and our—”

“Hush!” she interrupted; and turned and put two of her dainty fingers against his lips to silence him.

He caught them and held them, crushing them against his lips. He drew the hand yet nearer and buried his own lips in the palm of it. He reached out with one of his arms and put it around

her, and drew her to him, and held her so, with her shapely head pillowed against his shoulder, his hand stroking her gold-brown hair. He turned her face upward to his. He looked into her eyes and she returned the gaze; and her own were soft and pleading and luminous, and maddening in the fascination of them. He lowered his face nearer and nearer to hers, and she did not seek to avoid him.

Their lips met, and clung together, and lingered, and the world, and the storm, and the memory of things past, faded into nothingness. Yesterday was forgotten; to-morrow would never come; there was only the Now—and in that moment they lived it.

Then, very gently, but firmly, Judith drew away from him.

"Please," she said, faintly.

"Forgive me, dear. I could not help it," he replied, brokenly.

"Nor I," she murmured. "I could not help it, either," and she sank slowly back into the depth of the Morris chair from which she had risen, bearing her weight on one foot, to greet him when he came into the room.

Boone stood before her, contrite, but not sorry for what had happened, looking down upon her.

"You must not," she said, weakly, breathlessly, "do that again, Boone. You must not let me do

it. You must have strength for us both. Promise me, Boone."

"I will try, dear."

"No. Promise me."

"I will—try very hard, Judith. But, you do—care—don't you? You care?"

"Yes," she faltered, "I care—very much—Boone, dear. But—"

"But what, Judith?"

"I am afraid—horribly afraid—tragically, bitterly afraid—that it—can never be—as we want it to be," she replied brokenly, and buried her face in her hands; but not to weep; rather, to hide it for the moment from him.

"Why?" he asked. "Will you tell me why, now?"

But she shook her head, and was silent.

After a moment he turned away. He crossed the room to another window and stood for a time facing it, with his back toward her. Then, resolutely, he returned and stopped directly in front of her.

"Judith," he said, "listen to me."

"Yes," she replied, but without looking up at him.

"I love you," he said, with calm forcefulness. "Love came to me out there in the tempest, either when I first saw you, or afterward, when I held you in my arms and carried you, and brought you

here. Then, it was only a little thing, which I had never known before, and therefore did not recognize. But it has grown, Judith. It has broadened, and strengthened, and developed, until it has turned itself into a giant of force and insistence that overpowers me; and each day and hour and minute it gets bigger and stronger and more beyond my control. I love you."

He was silent for a moment, and then went on in the same even tone of conviction:

"And you love me, Judith. I am convinced of it. Also, I believe that you have loved me almost from the first—from that moment, at least, when you called me a big boy, out there in the dining room, and asked me if I was afraid of you. Is it true, Judith?"

"Yes," she replied in a low tone, without lifting her eyes, "it is true. Quite true."

"Will you marry me? Will you be my wife? Will you go with me as soon as we are enabled to leave here, and stand before a minister with me, and say the words that will give yourself to me for ever and ever?"

She was silent. She made no reply whatever, either by word or gesture; yet neither did she offer objection.

"Think a moment," he said. "A week will have passed, or a week and a day, perhaps more days, before we can go away. Throughout all of that

time you have been—you will have been—here, in this bungalow, alone with me. Do you realize, dear, what that fact will mean to you, when it becomes known to your friends, or your relatives, or your parents, or to whosoever may have claims upon you?"

Judith nodded.

"And it will be known; it must be," he went on, quietly. "When you return to your personal world you will have to tell somebody about it; and, Judith, dear, won't it be infinitely better for you—would it not be very much better even if we did not love each other?—if you could say to all of them, of me, 'This is my husband'?"

She raised her eyes to his, quickly, and they were flashing.

"And do you suppose for a moment that I would marry you for that reason?" she demanded, hotly. "I do not care—that!"—she snapped her finger contemptuously—"what anybody may think, or say. I care less, much less, than a snap of my finger and thumb for what may be thought or said by anybody about *me*. I am thinking about you, not of myself."

"You are thinking of me? You are hesitating because of me?" he asked, amazed.

"Yes. I know everything concerning you, for you have told me everything, and I know that what you have told is true. I know your pride of race;

you have told me of that, too. I know about your father, and your mother, and what they expect of you—and how it would crush them to the earth with disappointment if you should go against their wishes. And you would go against them bitterly, if you should make me your wife. . . . Listen to me, Boone. Do not interrupt . . . I am not of your world, however you may believe in me. I am not one who is fit to become Boone Pendleton's wife, according to the criterions of your people. That is why I have not told you. That is why I will not tell you now."

"But, Judith—"

"No," she interrupted, quickly. "I will not marry you when we escape from here. But—if—a year hence, or even a month hence—after you have discovered all there is to know about me—if then you should come to me, of your own free will and desire, and ask me to be your wife, I will say to you, 'Yes, Boone, and with all my heart and soul and love, forever and ever, Amen.'"

He got down on his knees beside her chair. She rested one of her hands upon his hair, and stroked it gently.

"You love me, Judith?" he breathed, softly.

"Yes," she replied, "I love you, as you love me—wholly."

Then he caught both of her hands in his, and held them, and buried his face in them.

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And for a long time after that both were silent; and the twilight stole in at the windows; evening fell upon them; content unspeakable dwelt with them.

They loved.

CHAPTER V

JUDITH'S PERIL

THE seventh day was flooded with sunlight.

After breakfast, as soon as Boone had established Judith comfortably at her window, he announced his intention of cleaning up his car, of digging it out of its sarcophagus of clay, and otherwise preparing for the time when the negro should bring the gasoline.

He had not gone an hour when the negro arrived.

Judith heard a rapping at the back door, and was startled, but she got out of her chair, and, with the aid of her crutches, limped out of the room in response to it. Her foot and ankle were greatly improved; she could bear weight upon them, and might have moved about fairly well without the crutches, although Boone had advised against it.

A burly, gray-headed negro was at the door. Beside him, on the ground, he had put down a two-gallon can of gasoline. Behind him, twenty feet or more away, were two other men—white men, both—of whom, particularly as to one of

them, she thought she had some faint remembrance. All too late she regretted that she had permitted them to discover her, for she saw them exchange significant glances, and some words in a low tone that she could not overhear. Then they moved slowly, but with evident hesitancy, toward her.

"Come inside," she said to the negro; and as he stepped through the doorway, bringing the gasoline with him, she closed it after him, and shot the bolt into place.

"Who are those men?" she demanded of the negro the instant the door was fastened.

"One of 'em 's de constable, missy, from Jasper Center, whar I done got de gas'line. I dunno who de udder one am, 'cept dat he's an ossifer of some kin,' " the negro replied, and Judith remembered, then, why one of the two faces had impressed her as being familiar.

"What do they want?" she asked, quickly.

"They's lookin' for a lil' missy what done got lost in de storm; leastwise dat's de onliest thing I know 'bout 'em," was the reply. "When they done fin' out dat I was after gas-line to bring over heah to Mistuh Boone Pendleton, they reckoned mebby dat de missy they was lookin' fo' might be heah, an' so they brung me back across de river in their launch-boat, stid of me havin' to paddle over. I reckon mebby dat you is de lil' missy what they is after."

Judith pressed one hand against her heart to still its beating. Only too well she knew that she was that "lil' missy" that the constable from Jasper Center, and the officer with him, were seeking.

She was frightened, and badly; but she controlled the outward evidences of it.

She thought rapidly, and then, bidding the negro follow, and to leave the gasoline where it was, she hobbled hurriedly into the room that she had learned, in seven days, to regard as her own.

Seizing paper and pencil, she wrote rapidly these words:

Boone, dear:

Come to me at once, please. Two
strange men are here. I am afraid.
Hasten. Judith.

She folded her message and pressed it into the negro's palm. Then, as well as she could do so, and rapidly, she explained to him how Pendleton might be found, and where, and he asked some questions about the roadway and its turns and twists—none of which she could answer, but finally announced that he reckoned he could find the place.

"Go to him as quickly as possible," Judith directed. "Give him that message. He will return here with you to get the gasoline, and I am sure—I promise for him—that if you are quick, he

will give you twice as much money as he promised."

Then she put him out at the front door, and closed and locked it after him. She went to the windows, one after another, and closed and fastened each one; and then, as she was about to return to her chair to wait, and to pray for the hasty return of Boone Pendleton, she heard a rapping, and rather a peremptory one, she thought, at the back door.

Judith paid no attention; but after a moment the rapping was repeated, and with even more insistence.

Still she did not respond to it, but when it came a third time, and had resolved itself into a pounding, she left her chair, seized her crutches, and with set lips and white face, limped out of the room toward the sound of it.

"Who is there?" she demanded through the door.

"Two officers of the law, madam. Let us enter, if you please," one of the men replied.

"What do you want?" she asked, striving to keep her voice from trembling, and succeeding better than she knew.

"You, madam, we think," the same voice responded. "We want a young woman who, at least, answers very well to your general appearance. I must ask you again to let us in."

"No," she said, "I cannot do that. I am alone. My—my husband—will return shortly. You will have to wait until he comes. And, you are mistaken in supposing that I am the person you are after, or that such a person is here. I am alone."

"We want a young woman by the name of Eleanor Beverley, otherwise Elanor Ralston and Elanor J. Ralston. And your husband, madam, is not near at hand, nor will he return to you here, shortly. He is, at this moment, in jail, at Jasper Corners, awaiting my return. The game is up, Eleanor, so open the door. If you do not—" The pause was significant.

"There is no such person here as you have named," Judith replied, steadily and coldly, through the panels of the door. "My husband is near at hand. He *will* return shortly."

"Oh, well," the man outside said, brutally, "I don't know how many husbands you've got, of course—several, probably—but the one I mean is in jail, and can't get here. And if you do not open that door for us, we will force it. I came here to get you, and to take you back with me, and I'm going to do it."

Judith clutched at the back of a chair within her reach.

"I am armed," she called out, at a venture. "If you attempt to force the door, I will shoot through it."

The man who had done all the talking laughed.

"Big talk," he said, and laughed again. "We won't have to force the door. It is easier to break a window. It will be easier for you to shoot at me through a window, too."

Judith could hear him as he moved away. She knew that in another instant he would appear at the window, that he could smash it with the butt of a pistol, or a stone, or a stick, and that he could reach inside and turn the catch.

Biting her lips to keep from crying out in her terror, she turned about and almost ran, with the aid of her crutches and one good foot, into the adjoining room, and closed the door after her, praying in the meanwhile that it was provided with a bolt.

It was.

She shot it into place. She hurried, then, into her own room, where she knew that a double-barreled shot-gun hung on a rack against the wall. She also knew that it was not loaded, for, only recently, Boone had exhibited to her, with pride, the shining inside of the barrels. But the sight of it to those men, if they should break into the house, and the feel of it in her own grasp, might serve to hold them at bay until Boone could get to her; and she knew that he would lose no time, once the negro found him.

There was no bolt on the second door that she

had passed, but she managed, with much effort, to drag the Morris chair against it. Then she took down the gun, wishing that she had cartridges for it but shuddering at the thought, and retreated to the farthest corner of the room to wait.

She heard the crash of breaking glass as she took up her position.

She was very pale, and very badly frightened, just then; but it was not of the two men who were outside, forcing their way into the house that she was thinking.

Her lips moved, but no sound came from between them. Had there been, the words would have said:

“Oh, why did I not tell him all—everything? Why was I such a fool as to wait? He would have believed. He would have understood. And now—now—”

Somebody pounded against the inner door that she had bolted. A voice called out to her, demanding that it be opened at once, or that it would be broken down. Those men were already inside of the house.

Judith waited in silence. She half raised the gun, and held it so that she could point it at the two men when they came.

Then resounding blows fell against the bolted door that she had closed against them, and they were by no means gentle. The splintering, crash-

ing sounds that the men were making told her that one of them had found an ax and was using it.

After another moment the sounds ceased, and she could hear them approaching the last barrier, which was not locked. She knew that they had made a hole in the panel of the other door, and had reached through, and unfastened it.

The Morris chair began to tremble and give; then it moved slowly toward the middle of the room; and then the foremost of the two men stuck his head through the opening, and peered in at her, grinning.

But the grin froze on his face.

Judith was holding the double-barreled gun in the proper position, and the muzzles of it were aimed directly at his face and eyes. He dodged back, out of sight.

"None of that, you!" he called out from beyond the door.

"I will shoot you if you come a step into this room," Judith replied, calmly, knowing that she could not do so because the gun was not loaded.

Again he showed his face at the opening, having mustered up a little courage. Then he pushed the door wider ajar.

"I'm not coming in—yet," he explained, as he did so. "But I want to look at you, and talk to you. I want to ask you what you think you'll gain by acting in this way. Not a thing, believe

me! Bud Ralston is in the coop; we got him dead to rights; and it wasn't my fault that I didn't get you at the same time, my lady. But you had lit out, on horseback, before breakfast, and I didn't get to Jasper till noon. All the same, I went after you. Do you get me?"

"Yes, Go on," Judith replied. She wished to keep him talking as long as possible. Every moment that passed brought Boone Pendleton just one moment nearer to her.

"I traced you, on horseback, almost twenty miles—all over the country, but never very far away. Then it began to rain, and I had to go back. And then, later, the horse you had been riding turned up without you. . . . Huh! It would be a funny thing if I couldn't spot you, Elanor—"

"You will remember to be respectful when you address me," she warned him, angrily, and moved the pointed gun so that he dodged.

"It would be a funny thing if I didn't spot you, dressed in your riding habit, all but the long thing you put over it, in the saddle, wouldn't it?"

Judith made no reply.

"Everybody thought you were dead, or lost in the storm, and would be killed, when the horse came back without you. But I didn't. I asked questions. I remembered the last spot to which I had traced you. I heard that there was this lone house up here, that wasn't lived in. I put two and two

together. I says to myself, 'That's where she is. She's turned the horse adrift, knowing it would come home, and she has broken into that house, and that is where I'll find her after this storm passes.' Then the nigger showed up. They told me that he belonged over here. So—"

He stopped. He flung the door wide open and jumped forward toward her.

Judith had caught a faint and distant sound from outside, and had bent her head to listen, paying no heed to the man who was talking. Her attention was thus, for the instant, diverted.

The man was upon her before she knew it. The gun, useless at best, was torn from her grasp and flung aside.

Judith tottered, and the sudden, wrenching pain in her ankle when the fellow seized her made her cry out sharply.

A voice from the outside answered her, but she did not hear it, for she was struggling in the grasp of the man who had attacked her. Heavy steps fell upon the flooring of the veranda; but she did not hear them, either; nor did the man with whom she struggled—who was hurting her terribly as she tried so vainly to fight him off.

"Boone!" she called aloud in her desperation. "Boone!"

There came a crash of breaking glass as Boone Pendleton smashed one of the piazza chairs through

the window, and a second blow of the same kind cleared the way for him. With a bound, he leaped into the room, and the man who was struggling with Judith released his hold upon her, and turned about, pulling an automatic pistol from one of his pockets as he did so. The second man, too, ran forward from the open doorway, brandishing a stout stick in one hand.

"Hands up!" the officer who had attacked Judith ordered. He was not without courage when he had a man to face.

But Boone, apparently, did not hear the order. Certainly he paid no attention to it. He did not put up his hands; neither did he hesitate.

The officer leveled the pistol to fire; he meant to fire; but he had forgotten that when he turned to face the newcomer, he had turned his back upon a desperate woman.

Judith saw it all. She saw the leveled pistol, and Boone Pendleton's onward rush, in spite of it.

She threw herself forward; she seized the officer's arm; the pistol barked venomously. But the bullet from it went wild. The man's aim had been deflected in time.

The next instant Pendleton got to him, and they crashed to the floor together.

CHAPTER VI

"THY RIGHT HAND SHALL HOLD ME"

BOONE PENDLETON was a college trained athlete. Besides that fact, he had inherited unusual strength, as has already been established by his carrying Judith on his back more than a mile through the storm and the clay mud that was as slippery as grease, as sticky as wax and more uncertain of footing than glary ice.

The bullet fired at him from the automatic, deflected by the quick attack of Judith against the man who would have shot him, went wide of its mark, and when the two men crashed to the floor together, with Boone on top, his right hand seized the self-styled officer by the throat and gripped it so that almost at once the muscles of the man relaxed, and he let go his hold in order to grasp Boone's wrist, seeking vainly to tear away that choking, vice-like stricture on his breathing.

The automatic pistol fell from his hand to the floor, uselessly; and Judith saw it. She bent quickly forward and seized it—seized it and raised it as one who is accustomed to the handling of such a

weapon, just as the constable from Jasper Center sprang to the assistance of the officer.

Two quick steps forward he made, and halted—for the automatic in Judith's grasp was leveled directly at him, and behind it he could see that her eyes blazed with no uncertain meaning.

He caught his breath; his face turned ashen. He was a Southerner, a Virginian, and in his day had faced many a loaded gun, and he was not a coward. But he knew when discretion was the better part of valor—and he knew, just then, that if he took one more step forward it would be his last.

In the meantime the struggle on the floor practically had ceased.

The man who had attacked Judith and who would have shot down Boone Pendleton without hesitation because he knew that the law would protect him after the act, was no match for the great strength and trained efficiency of the younger man.

The fight was over almost as soon as it began, and Boone, still with one hand clutching the officer's throat, raised himself upon one knee and relieved the prostrate man of his second weapon.

The officer gasped, and attempted to rise, but a stern command from Boone and the glimpse of his own second weapon aimed at his head, sent him

to the floor again, sprawling on his back, with his arms extended helplessly beside him in abject surrender.

Pendleton, barely ruffled by the exertions of the short struggle, smiled amusedly when he comprehended the details of the scene that confronted him.

The constable from Jasper Center stood midway between the open door and the conquered man on the floor. His arms were lifted toward the ceiling, and, while there was no indication of fear in his expression, it was plain that he perfectly understood the danger in which he stood.

Boone chuckled, partly from the sense of relief, partly because he was amused, although there was still an angry glint in his eyes. He did not understand the attack on Judith by those two men. He had not thought about a reason for it. It had been made—that was enough. And he, thanks to the negro, had arrived in time.

"I wouldn't mind having a snapshot of this scene, Judith," he said. "Hold him so, just a moment longer, until I——" He did not finish the sentence, but he passed behind the constable and "frisked" him for weapons, and relieved him of an old-fashioned five-shot Colt of 45-caliber.

That done, he returned to the man on the floor and bent over him, searching the side pockets of his coat—and found what he sought: a pair of

handcuffs of the latest design. Already he had discovered the star of authority on the constable's much worn vest, and also the official shield that the other man wore, fastened to his suspender.

He locked one of the steel bracelets around the officer's left wrist, and helped him to his feet where he stood, half dazed by the choking he had received; then he fastened the other one to the constable's left wrist.

"There," he said, "you face in opposite directions now. You won't try to do any unexpected stunts while you are in that fix, I reckon. March, now! We will go to the dining room. This happens to be a private room. Judith, rest yourself a moment, then follow us as soon as you care to do so. I reckon these chaps would have won out if it had not been for your ready wit. Hello, you! Caesar. Come in here. I want you." This last to the gray-headed negro who was peering affrightedly in upon them through the shattered window.

"Yassir, Mistuh Boone," the negro replied, and climbed inside.

In the dining room Boone placed two chairs so that they faced one another nearly side by side; for, as the men were handcuffed, it was the only way in which they could be seated comfortably; and it was then, when they were seated, that the officer who wore the shield on his suspender found his voice and tongue.

"You'll pay for this, Mr. Boone Pendleton," he snapped out, savagely. "I'm an officer of the——"

"Boone!" Judith interrupted from the doorway; it was the door that the men had forced in their attack upon her. She had followed them to the dining room.

Pendleton turned quickly toward her. Her face, now that immediate danger was passed, was as white as chalk. She trembled where she stood, clinging to the casing at either side of her.

The officer whom she had interrupted laughed insolently. He had quite recovered his equipoise.

"You want to get your little word in first, do you, my lady?" he jeered. "Well, go——"

"Shut up, you!" Boone broke in, sharply. Then he bent forward and looked straight into the eyes of the man, holding his gaze, while he said, slowly, but with undoubted emphasis: "You will speak only when you are told to do so, Mister Man; and if you don't obey me, I'll lock you up in the smoke-house till you come to your senses. It makes no difference to me who you are—yet. We will get to that later. I am not in the mood to listen to any of your insolence, even if you do wear that badge. Get me?"

"You'd better keep your trap shut fur the present, Mistuh Fayban," the constable interposed. "I knowed this young man's daddy, and his grand-

father, too; an' the Pendletons mos' generally mean what they say. Smoke-houses ain't comfortable places to rest in."

Boone turned toward the negro.

"Caesar," he said, "watch these two men. You need not go near them, nor lift a hand; but if they try to get off those chairs, you call me. Stand over there by the door and watch them."

"Yassir, Mistuh Boone."

"Now, Judith," Pendleton said, and went swiftly to her; and he put his arm around her, and led her back to the room that she had learned to regard as her own. "Now, sweetheart, what is it?" he asked her, forcing her gently into the Morris chair which he drew forward to its accustomed place at the window.

"Don't!" she cried out with a half gasp, hiding her face in her hands. "Don't call me that. Not yet. Please don't." He could see that she trembled. He had never thought that a human face could turn so white as hers was as he took her two hands in his and pulled them gently away from her eyes—eyes that were wide and staring, startled and afraid.

"There, there, dear," he said, and patted her shoulder fondly and delicately. "You will be all right in a moment, Judith. You are frightened now—now that the worst of it is over. And why, pray, shouldn't I call you sweetheart? You are

my sweetheart. You love me. You confessed it. And I love you, dear, with all——"

"Please!" she interrupted him; and then, when he stopped, she went on, with that wide-eyed stare unwaveringly fixed upon him: "You love me—now. You think you do. In——"

"I know that I do," he interposed, quietly.

"In an hour from now, or less," she continued, unheedingly, "you will hate and despise me. When that man out there tells you about me, when he tells you who and what I am, and all that he and his kind believe me to be, you will—oh, Boone!" she broke off, wildly, while a sob rose in her throat. "Don't—please do not believe him! It is not the truth that he will tell you. But he believes it to be true—all of it; and others believe it. And I am wretched; oh, so wretched. I should have told you everything yesterday. I should have told it all to you this morning before you went away and left me here alone. I know it now. I knew it the moment you had gone from me. But—I could not. I tried to do so, but the words would not come. And now—now—now—" She broke into a passion of weeping.

Pendleton dropped upon one knee beside the Morris chair. He put his arms around her and drew her toward him, and held her tightly while he said:

"Listen to me, Judith. I love you. You are

my mate. You belong to me. I found you out there beside the road, in the storm, where, if I had not found you, you would have perished. But you were sent there to wait for me, and I was sent there to find you. By every unwritten law of man you belong to me now. You are mine, and I shall not let you go. And, Judith dear, this is what I want to say: I shall go to the dining room now, to talk to that man Fayban, but it will make no difference to me what he says—it may make some difference to him if he is not respectful. But nothing that anybody, no matter who, can say or do, will make the slightest difference between you and me. Nothing can be said or done by anybody, high or low, whether it be true or false, that can affect my love for you, or diminish it. I love you. That is the ALL—the one great fact. And, dear one, I have infinite faith in my own destiny. If you were not all that I believe you to be, I could not love you as I do. I know it. It is written.”

Judith had closed her eyes while she listened to him. Now she opened them. She lifted her hands, and pressed the palms of them against his cheeks. She looked steadily into his eyes, searching them, and with much of the terror of a moment ago gone out of her own. She drew his face nearer to her until their lips met. And then, with her lips touching his, she breathed rather than spoke the words that came to her, quoting from the 139th Psalm:

"If I take the wings of the morning and fly to the uttermost parts of the sea, there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. That verse has been my one comfort, Boone, and now, at last, I know what it means. Yes, dear one, I *am* all that you believe me to be. But—you will find it hard to believe—when you have been told all that there is to tell."

"No," he replied, "I will not."

"You will find it hard, Boone," she insisted, gently. "But something here"—she took one hand from his face and pressed it over her heart—"tells me that you will be steadfast."

"I will, Judith."

"So," she went on, "go to the man Fayban. Let him talk. Listen to his story—to all of it. Do not resent what he may say—at least until you have heard it to the end. Then, when you have heard it all, come back here to me. I will be waiting, and I will know, at once, everything that you think, and feel."

"Judith, do you love me?" he asked her.

"With all my heart, and soul, and life. Now go, dear, go. I can say only this: The things that you will be told are not true in fact, although they are in appearance. So go to that man, and hear him—with patience, if you can."

Pendleton pressed his lips against her forehead, and rose, and went into the dining room.

CHAPTER VII

FAYBAN'S CHARGES

PENDLETON found the two men precisely as he had left them, seated beside one another, but facing in opposite directions, as was made necessary by the manner in which they were handcuffed together. Caesar, the negro, was on guard at the door.

The officer who had been so strenuous in his attack, spoke up at once, as soon as Pendleton entered the dining room. He had found a cigar in one of his pockets, lighted it, and seemed thoroughly self-possessed and at his ease.

"Mr. Pendleton," he said—and there was not a trace of resentment in his voice—"my name is Horace Fayban. I am a government officer, as, no doubt, you have already discovered."

Boone nodded.

"I came down here on a special mission, Mr. Pendleton. In fact, I have been working on that special mission nearly eighteen months. I happened to know this man beside me—Champ Lee,

the constable at Jasper Center—and so I applied to him for such assistance as I might need.”

“I do not think that I care to hear your biography, or your itinerary, Mr. Fayban,” Boone said, quietly. “I am concerned only with what has happened to-day. You have forced your way into my house. You have attacked a lady inside of this house. You have threatened me with a pistol, and you would have shot me if you had not been prevented. The badge you wear does not give you authority to do those things.”

“I have a warrant——”

“That fact, if it is a fact, does not give you the right to break into my home,” Boone interrupted him.

“No; you are right about that, Mr. Pendleton,” Fayban admitted.

“Under the circumstances as I found them, I had a perfect right to shoot you down, as you attempted to shoot me. I am almost sorry that I did not do it.”

“Hardly that,” Fayban smiled back at him. “But we need not split hairs. We are both right and we are both wrong.”

“Possibly—to some extent.”

“I have a warrant for the arrest of the young woman I found here. I came down here to get her. I am going to take her back with me, or——”
He paused.

"Or what?" Boone asked, coldly.

"I was going to say this: If you attempt to prevent me from doing that, I shall return with force enough to take her, and you, too. It is a serious matter to interfere with an officer in the discharge of his duty, Mr. Pendleton."

"So I have been told. But there are duties—and duties. It seems to me that in the present circumstances I have one to perform, as well as you."

"Mr. Pendleton," Fayban asked, quietly, "do you know anything about the woman you are protecting?"

"You are not here to ask questions, nor I to answer them," Boone replied.

"I don't believe that you ever saw her in your life until the day when the storm began," Fayban insisted, unmoved. "And yet, when Champ Lee and I stood outside of this house and demanded admittance, she as good as told us that she was married to you—that you are her husband."

"Well, what of that?"

"Do you mean to tell me that it is true?"

"No; and I doubt if she said it. It is quite likely that she might have said that she expected her husband to return shortly. When a woman is alone in a house, and two strange men demand admittance, that would be quite the natural thing for her to say."

"Well, we'll pass that up, Mr. Pendleton," Fayban replied. "I happen to know her husband. His name is Brotherton Beverley, known also as Bud Beverley, and Bud Ralston—and there are other *aliases* that he uses when occasion demands. Just now he is in jail at Jasper Center, where the constable lodged him for safe keeping until I can take him away."

"Well?" Boone demanded, unmoved. Judith had fortified him against such charges. He felt not a particle of belief in the first part of the statement, although he could see that Fayban spoke with conviction.

"Well, what?" Fayban asked.

"What is the rest of the story? Why are you here, at my house, breaking into it?"

"I came here to get her; to get the woman."

"Why?"

"Because I have a warrant for her arrest."

"For what? On what charge?"

"Because she is one of a gang of counterfeiters that has been operating all the way from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and from Canada to the Rio Grande for the last four or five years. Is that sufficiently plain, Mr. Pendleton?"

"As far as it goes—yes."

"Listen to me a moment, Mr. Boone Pendleton."

"I am listening."

"You can buck up against the civil authorities

of a state for a time, and maybe carry out your bluff; but you can't do it with Uncle Sam. Don't forget that little fact. This woman is slicker than grease. She has pulled the wool over your eyes to beat the band. I can see that. She's a crook, Mr. Pendleton, of the worst——"

"Fayban"—Boone spoke sharply—"we, of the South, do not permit any person to speak disrespectfully of any woman, in our presence—particularly in our homes. I will ask you to keep that statement in mind as you proceed. Now, go on."

"You want the truth, don't you?"

"Yes—what you know of your own knowledge to be the truth. But—understand me—officer or not, if you make charges against the lady in question, you must substantiate them. Otherwise—" he hesitated.

"Well? Otherwise, what?"

"Otherwise I will take that shield from your suspender and the steel bracelet from your wrist, and give you what you will deserve: a horsewhipping. Now, go on. I will try to listen to the end without interruption."

Fayban laughed, but without mirth, and with very little sound.

"You ought to be grateful to me for not resenting—this," he said, and rattled the handcuff on his left wrist. "But while you were in the other room Champ convinced me of the wisdom of not re-

senting it. I am quite willing to forget all about this little episode after you have been brought to your senses, and are convinced that you are harboring and protecting a criminal. For that is the fact, Mr. Pendleton, however much the young woman may have convinced you to the contrary before I appeared here, and since.

"Bud Beverley, alias Ralston, is the genius and the brains of as daring and as expert a gang of counterfeiters as ever puzzled the government authorities. The department has been on his trail nearly five years, and he has outwitted it at every lap—at every stage of the game. We have known what he was doing, but we have not been able to nail him. He lives like a prince, spends money—good money, too—like a nabob, stays at the best hotels, and conducts himself like a gentleman; and he is one, when all is said, if you cut out the two yellow streaks in his make-up."

"Two?" Pendleton asked, smiling. "Counterfeiting—and I suppose the passing of counterfeit money—is one of them, according to your statement. What is the other one?"

"He is another Raffles."

"Another what?"

"Raffles. A so-called gentleman burglar."

"Do you *know* that to be so, Mr. Fayban?"

"No—only that I am morally convinced of it. But that is another matter. I have nothing to do

with it. It concerns only the local authorities wherever he has operated. Still, there isn't any doubt of it—not the least. And this woman—this Eleanor Beverley, his wife, is his pal, his partner, his assistant.”

“But——”

“Now, wait a moment. You said you would not interrupt. Beverley is a Californian. He came from a good family that was rich at one time. He came into a fortune when he was twenty-five—he is thirty-six now—and spent all of it within three years. Then he turned his talents to the getting of easy money, and the counterfeiting game and the Raffles game are the consequence.”

“But——”

“Wait, please. Eighteen months ago, or thereabouts—it was just after I was assigned to the Beverley case—this girl, Eleanor Ralston, graduated from a woman's college in the West. She met Beverley soon after that, and he fascinated her. There was another woman with him at the time, and she is in the jail at Jasper Center with him now. She used to pass as his wife, at times, and at other times as his sister. Probably he succeeded in convincing Eleanor of the latter relationship. Anyhow, she took up with him, and traveled with both of them, and has been with them ever since. When they stop at hotels they invariably occupy a suite of rooms. Beverley always registers

'Brotherton Beverley and wife,' and 'Miss Beverley,' and it is always the other woman who is addressed as *Miss Beverley*; always this one who is addressed as *Mrs. Beverley*. I have never seen any marriage certificate, nor any signed church register, but there isn't any doubt, in my mind at least, that they are married, all right, and I'm willing to admit that perhaps the other woman is his sister.

"Now, Mr. Pendleton, you've got it pretty straight. Beverley and the other woman are under arrest, and in jail, and I have a warrant for this one. There are local charges against the three of them, in half a dozen states, although, as far as I can find out, not one of the localities has sufficient proof to indict them—to submit to a grand jury for their indictment.

"But where there is so much smoke there is bound to be fire. And, so far as *I* am concerned, I believe that I have collected enough evidence to send them away for counterfeiting. If I did not believe it, I would not have attempted to serve the warrants.

"I have not been off of their trail—in person, or through another operative working with me—for fifteen minutes since I came into the case. I *know* that this girl in the front room has passed 'the queer,' at different places, hundreds of times. I know that much. It is not conjecture; it is es-

tablished fact, of which I have the proof. So, you see, I can send her away, anyhow, for that, if for nothing else—and whether I succeed in nailing the rest of the game to the other two or not.

“We have held off—I have held off from making an arrest—because the plates from which the phony money is made are really of more importance than the individuals who make use of them. But—well, that is all. Now, Mr. Pendleton, what’s the answer? Are you going to permit me to take this young woman to Jasper Center with me or not?”

“I think,” Boone replied, hesitatingly, and in deep thought, “that we will go to her, presently, and talk with her about it.”

“What about these steel bracelets? Don’t you think that Lee and I have worn them long enough?”

“Yes—if you will give me your word that you will attempt no more violence, Fayban.”

“Oh, I’ll promise you that much, all right. If you won’t let me take the girl, I’ll go away without her. But—if I do that, *I will come back again to get her, and you, too.*”

“Threats, Mr. Fayban, do not go very far with me. But—where is the key to the handcuffs?”

“In my waistcoat pocket, at the right side.”

Calmly, before he unlocked the handcuffs, Boone stripped the two automatics of their cartridges, and served the cylinder of the Colt likewise; then he put the three weapons on the table while he re-

leased the prisoners. Next he brought a decanter and some sugar and glasses from the sideboard and asked the two men to help themselves. But he made no move, as yet, to conduct them to the room where Judith was waiting.

Instead, he seated himself again and offered them cigars; and presently, when Fayban's impatience was becoming apparent, he said:

"You seem quite positive that the lady has passed counterfeit money, which is, in itself, a felony, if it is done knowingly. Are you equally positive as to that?"

"Great Scot, Pendleton! Can you doubt it was done knowingly?"

"I prefer to be convinced of it, Mr. Fayban," was the quiet, but firm reply.

"Why, man alive, here is a girl that comes out of college, as pure and sweet as ever a girl was, I have no doubt. She gets up against an educated, gentlemanly crook, and is fascinated by him. Apparently she has no family ties, or, if she has, she ignores them for this man. She goes, literally, mind you, to live with this man and the woman who is already with him. She marries him—I haven't proof of that, but we will say that it is so. She travels with the two, she permits herself to be addressed as Mrs. Beverley—and she is not a fool, certainly. How, then, after six months, even, to say nothing of the year and a half, could she

remain in ignorance of Beverley's crookedness, and of the other woman's? It doesn't look reasonable that she should do so, does it? She passes counterfeit money—lots of it—all the way from coast to coast, time and time again. I have seen her do it, with my own eyes, and I've got phony bills in my pocket now that she has passed. Then she comes here in the storm and puts across some kind of a story to you. She stays here a week with you. Then I show up, and she says that you're her husband. Oh, what's the use! I've got to take her back with me, and that's all about it."

"No," Pendleton replied, slowly, thoughtfully, "I think that you will have to leave her here until to-morrow, and then return for her. You cannot take her away to-day, and I must have an opportunity to talk with her, alone."

"By heaven, Pendleton, if you make me do that, I'll take you, too, when I do return."

"That is final, Mr. Fayban, whatever you may elect to do," Boone replied firmly. "But, if you are ready, we will go to her now."

He led the way. The others followed. Caesar, the negro, had been sent outside before the conversation began.

The door into Judith's room was closed. Pendleton pushed it ajar and stopped at the threshold, amazed. Judith was not there. Neither were the crutches, nor her hat.

"Skipped," Fayban said with a harsh laugh. "I guess you put that up on me, Pendleton. You'll be sorry for it, too, believe me!"

Boone did not reply. Instead, he went outside, and he found the marks of Judith's crutches in the soft gravel in front of the piazza. He followed them in silence, and the constable and Fayban followed him.

Here and there, after they left the soft gravel, they found a mark of a crutch to direct them, and after a time they came to the place where the constable's launch had been tied to a sapling on the shore of the flooded swamp, with Caesar's scow floating astern of it. Both were gone.

Judith had escaped; and she had left them, temporarily, helpless to follow her.

Fayban laughed aloud.

"Any doubts left now, Mr. Pendleton?" he jeered.

CHAPTER VIII

JUDITH'S FLIGHT

JUDITH was very much in earnest when she told Boone Pendleton that she would await his return in the Morris chair at the window of her room, and that she would know at once, when he appeared, what effect the tale he was to hear from Fayban would have had upon him.

But the instant he was gone from her presence the confidence that she had felt in his faith in her vanished. Deprived of the strength of his personality beside her, she lost her courage, and a moment later, when the low murmur of the masculine voices reached her from the dining room, and she knew that the officer was relating the story of her past as he knew it—or confidently believed that he did—the sense of helplessness that had gripped her ever since the arrival of the officers overcame her.

She started to her feet before Pendleton had been gone from the room more than a moment or two and glanced this way and that around her like a caged animal that seeks a means of escape.

Her crutches were at her hand, although now she barely needed them. She seized them and crossed the room. Her hat hung upon the back of one of the rocking chairs. She put it on her head, pinning it deliberately to her abundant hair.

The panic within her increased with each passing moment. She knew some of the things that Fayban would be saying to Boone Pendleton by then, but not all of them, and it was only human that she should feel more fear concerning the things she did not know than of the things she did.

Fright, abject fright, took full possession of her; not fear of those officers of the law, and of what they might do, but heart-fear of the effect that Fayban's story might have upon the man she loved.

The thought of his returning to her with accusing eyes and destroyed faith was unbearable, and she could not then conjecture how it could be otherwise. Panic seized upon her and she fled.

She went out quietly, barely making a sound, using her crutches more from the force of the habit that had grown upon her during the last week than from necessity. In the graveled roadway before the house she paused. She knew that down the hill in front of her the highway was no more than a bed of soft, red mud, and she turned away from it to go around the house to seek some place to hide. That was her instinctive thought: to hide

where nobody could find her; not even Boone Pendleton.

The negro, Caesar, confronted her the moment she made the first turn, and with a great effort she controlled her fears and forced herself to speak with calmness; and Caesar, not over-endowed with intelligence, suspected nothing of her pitiable state of mind, nor of her intention to escape. Indeed, he had understood not a thing about the happenings of that eventful day, and so he answered her readily enough, and directed her.

"I am going for a walk," she told him. "Where is the swamp that you crossed to get the gasoline? I would like to see it."

"Right over yender, missy," the negro replied. "Dere's a path leads down to whar we done lef' de boats, right yender behin' de smoke-house. Shall I show yo' de way, missy?"

"No, no; thank you. I prefer to go alone."

She left him hurriedly. "The boats!" she thought as she hastened onward, digging the crutches into the gravel and the soil, while with every minute that passed terror clamored more and more insistently behind her back. Fear is a deadly guest when it forces its presence upon one.

One of the boats was a launch; the negro had told her that when he brought the gasoline and revealed the identity of the two men who came with him. She had learned how to run a launch the

summer before that one at Lake George, whither her companions had taken her for a few weeks. The way of escape was suddenly opened to her; and more! She knew, because of the things that Boone had told her, that in all probability there was not another boat than those two to be found in that particular section which now, by the great rainfall and the rising of the rivers, had been turned into an island.

She found the launch without difficulty. With unnatural strength, superinduced by her terrors, she lifted its nose from the shallow bank and shoved it into deeper water.

She clambered aboard it. With a great oar that she found on the deck beside the cockpit she poled it from the shore and turned it. She cranked the shaft, and the spark caught. She sprang to the steering wheel and headed for the farthest point that she could see on the opposite shore.

Concerning the direction that she should take she knew nothing at all; it was only that she wanted to get away—away—to the farthest point possible from Boone Pendleton and his accusing eyes, which she was sure would be the consequence of his conference with that terrible man, Fayban.

Without knowing it, she guided the boat directly to the nearest point to Jasper Center, and she did not stop the engine of the launch until after it had run at full speed against the soft and oozy shore

and climbed upon it so that she could step out onto comparatively dry footing.

Then she shut off the engine, seized her crutches, and climbed over the bow.

She found a faintly outlined pathway, and followed it, her crutches sinking deeply into the water-soaked soil with every step; but she went on and on, caring little or nothing about where the path might lead her, until she came out of the wood and discovered to her amazement, and consternation, too, that she was directly behind the hotel at Jasper Center where she had been staying when she started out for the ride that had ended by flinging her almost literally into the arms of Boone Pendleton.

Judith came to an abrupt halt when she recognized the hotel.

It was a summer resort, and as yet it held only a few guests. Brotherton Beverley had selected it for a short sojourn because of its isolation, although that was not the reason he had given to Judith.

She stood several moments at the edge of the wood trying to decide what was best for her to do. She knew that the few guests would doubtless be out on the roads, riding or motoring or walking, for it was the first really pleasant day after the week of incessant rain.

She went inside, presently, by the back way.

She climbed the stairs noiselessly. She encountered nobody. She found the room that had been hers. The door stood open. She went inside and closed it and locked it—and stared around her pantingly. Her terrors were no less than they had been, although now they had assumed a somewhat different character.

Her trunk, over in one corner, was closed and strapped, but the key to it was inside of the hand-strap purse that was in the pocket of her riding habit. It was still early in the day, and she knew that there was small chance that she would be disturbed in that room for hours to come; and so, with almost frantic zeal and effort, she finally succeeded in throwing back the trunk-lid, and thus opened the way to her possessions: her clothes, her jewelry—and to the money she had been carefully saving for the last six months against just such an emergency as confronted her at that moment.

Judith knew that she would find it, for she had hidden it away so that nobody would suspect its presence.

The bath, the entire change of clothing, the tailor-made suit that she put on, the jaunty sailor hat of white leghorn swathed in a voluminous filmy veil that hid her features to the point of unrecognition save by intimates, the possession of her jewels and the money that she had saved so carefully, and the sense of freedom she felt from the almost certain



knowledge that none of the men she had left behind her could leave the impromptu island for hours to come, restored her natural courage. She was, by nature, fearless. It was not impending disaster from which she had fled so precipitously—not the dread of arrest and possible imprisonment. For six months and more she had looked that possibility in the face and anticipated it—had realized that it might happen at any moment.

Judith had fled from the possibility of Boone Pendleton's destroyed faith in her.

That was the terror that had overcome her, not the dread of the officers who had sought her at Pendleton's bungalow. She could face disaster bravely, fearlessly; but that great dread lest the man she loved should become convinced that she was perfidious, false, and the wife or the mistress of another man, had filled her with a horror that had driven her, like a scared thing, from the possibility of confronting such an ordeal.

But that hour and more, in her room at the hotel where she thought and planned, while she bathed and dressed and repacked her trunk, restored her fearlessness, brought her to her senses. She began to see things as they really were—and, more than all else, renewed the confidence she had felt in Boone Pendleton's faith in her.

It was half past two in the afternoon when Judith was quite ready to begin the fulfillment of the plans

she had made since she entered the hotel by the back way, and she walked leisurely down the two flights of stairs to the office floor. She had relinquished her crutches. In her walk there was only a slight suggestion of a limp.

She had not traveled in the company of Bud Beverley for eighteen months without acquiring a certain knowledge of many of his methods. She had seen him, many times, double on his tracks and dodge hither and thither to avoid unpleasant and annoying people, without in the least understanding why he did so; but she had learned, nevertheless. It was only since six months ago that she had begun to understand things; and they had been six months of contemptuous horror, of watchful waiting, and of resolution to escape from it all at the first opportunity that offered.

Now it was at hand.

The way was open if she but had wit enough to make the most of it; and so she recalled to her naturally resourceful mind every item of strategy that she had learned and stored away in her memory during her association with Beverley.

There was nobody in the great beamed room that was called the office when she went to the desk save the beardless youth who performed the duties of assistant clerk until the regularly engaged functionary should arrive. He was dozing in his chair behind the desk; a gray-haired negro dozed in an-

other one that was tilted back against the house just outside of the door. No other person was in sight.

Judith knew that the bold and direct way was the only way. She was aware, also, of the customary reticence of officers with warrants to serve, and she decided that although Fayban had arrested her two companions and lodged them in jail, he would have said nothing of his intentions concerning herself lest she should be warned and take flight. At all events, boldness, directness and a total ignoring of any thought of interference with her plans was her only way to escape from Jasper Center before Fayban should return, and she made the most of every possibility that occurred to her.

"There is an express for Richmond that leaves here at 3.45," she said calmly when the youth sprang from his chair to serve her. "Please have my trunk taken to the station at once—and let me have my bill—Room 139." Everything went with the smoothness and precision of clockwork. If the youthful clerk had heard of the arrest of her companions, or if he knew that they *were* her companions, he had forgotten all about it. Judith tipped him liberally, and she tipped the old negro and his son when they brought down her trunk and carried it between them the short distance to the station. Then, with her small handbag in her grasp, she followed them.

But she did not go direct to the station. She

went to the county jail instead, for she had asked the old negro where it could be found. A constable, the counterpart of Champ Lee, was the solitary occupant of the little office when she got there, and he, like everybody else in Jasper Center, apparently, was half asleep, with his chair tilted backward.

"You have a prisoner here named Beverley," Judith announced authoritatively. "Take me to him. I must see him at once."

CHAPTER IX

BEVERLEY—AND THE OTHER WOMAN

"I HAVE returned, Bud," Judith announced calmly, when she stopped before the bars of his cell-door, to which the constable conducted her. There were eight cells in a row, and he occupied the last one toward the left as she entered. The "other woman" was confined in the farthest one toward the right from the short corridor that gave entrance to them from the little office at the front. There were no other prisoners.

"So, I see," Beverley replied, smilingly, as if it were the most natural thing in the world that she should find him in such a place. "You walk with a limp. What is the matter?"

"I hurt my ankle—but it is nearly well now." She turned to the constable, who acted as turnkey. "Will you leave us alone, please—for ten minutes?" she asked, and held out a bill for him to take. "You may return for me in ten minutes; and—unless you tell about it—nobody need know that Mr. Beverley has had a caller."

The man accepted the money. "Mmmm," he

throated with compressed lips of satisfaction while he pocketed the cash, "I reckon that'll be the best way. Nobody ain't liable to show up around here till after train-time, but there'll be a right smart of 'em nosin' 'round after that. Yo'-all ain't goin' to do nothin' agin th' law to git me into misery, air yo'?"

"Nothing whatever; just talk," Judith assured him; and he went back to his tilted chair outside.

"What if he should lock that door on you, girl?" Beverley asked, with another of his rare smiles. He was an astonishingly handsome man, with glistening white teeth, wavy, dark-brown hair and large, soft, luminous red-brown eyes that many a woman had envied him. But Judith knew, and the woman at the opposite end of the corridor knew, that those same eyes could be hard and cold on occasion, and could glitter like tempered and polished steel when the devil inside of him was aroused; and there was a devil—an implacable one—inside of Brotherton Beverley.

"He won't," she replied confidently.

"How does it happen that Fayban didn't nab you, too?" Beverley asked her.

"Never mind that now," Judith answered. "Six months ago, Bud, you gave me a little package to hide away in my trunk, and you told me then that if—if anything like this should happen to you to bring this to you."

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"Well, did you bring it?" he demanded eagerly.

"Yes. Here it is"; and she passed through the bars to him a small, round package eight inches in length.

"I have never opened it," she added, "so I do not know, although I can guess, what it contains. You will probably make your escape to-night, and—and you will take Vera with you."

"Naturally. You wouldn't have me leave her here, would you?"

Judith shrugged. Evidently she did not consider the question worthy of a reply.

"I never understood you, Bud, until you gave that package to me and explained how you might some time need it. My eyes were opened—partly—then; I have kept opening them wider and wider ever since. I know now a great deal more than you think I do."

"Yes? Well?" he replied with another of his smiles, which developed into a low, not unpleasant chuckle. "You had to find out some day, you know."

"I am going away on the afternoon train," she said. "It leaves very soon now; at 3.45. My trunk is at the station. I have paid my own hotel bill, and——"

"I don't quite see how you managed to do it all, girlie," he interrupted her. "Did you use your eyes and your smile and your wonderful charm

on that Fayban person and fascinate him? You're a wonder!"

"I am going away," she repeated, ignoring his question.

"Well, you will go to Dreamland, of course, and wait there for us—if Fayban doesn't stop you before you get there," Beverley said with conviction; and when she made no reply he took it for granted that such was her intention. "Vera and I will get away to-night, if at all," he went on. "We won't be very far behind you. Did you notice if the car is under the hotel shed yet as you came past it?"

"Yes. It is there."

"And the tank is full, thank heaven. We will have to go by a roundabout course, but we ought to make Dreamland within—oh, well—two weeks at the most."

"What if Fayban should return in time to take you away from here to-night?" Judith asked. "The article in that package would be of little service to you in that case."

"That's so, girl. You must go to Vera and tell her for me——"

"I will not speak to Vera, Bud."

He laughed aloud. "Oh, you women!" he said mockingly, and wrote rapidly on the back of an envelope that he took from his pocket, after which he passed it through the bars to Judith. "You won't refuse to give that to her," he added. "She

will hand it to you again after she has read it. I don't want it to be found in her cell. If Fayban does show up, Vera must play sick and send for a doctor. She can do it to the queen's taste. I hope you've got enough money to carry you through, girlie. It was the only thing that they took away from me when they shoved me in here. I suppose they were afraid that I would bribe the turn-key."

"I have sufficient," she told him; "and—I am going now."

"I wish you would go to——"

"No, Bud, don't ask me to do anything more than I have done. It will be all that I can do to get away—and—and I do not want to do that."

"All right, little girl, go ahead. I'll manage the rest of it somehow. Come nearer, and let me kiss your forehead." When she obeyed him and he saw a suggestion of moisture in her eyes, when he had touched his lips lightly to her white forehead and she had stepped away from him again, he added, with feeling: "I've been more or less of a brute to you, dear, since you came out of college, but you are very dear to me just the same. I love you just the same as I always did, Elanor—my little Nell-girl. It was a rotten thing for me to do, to mix you up in my affairs; but—it's too late now to talk about that. Only this: When I get to Dreamland, where you will be waiting for me, I am going to

send you away for keeps. Understand that, Nell-girl?"

"Oh, Bud, I wish—I wish that you would send *her* away—and then that *we* could go away somewhere together—and that you would be good—and do right, and——"

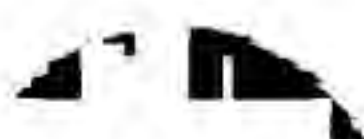
"I'm afraid it is too late for that now, girl. And, you know, I can't go back on Vera. That wouldn't be square. You hate her, and she—never mind all of that now. Here comes the man with the keys to take you away. Good-by for the present, Nell-girl. Buck up. Be brave. The bars that can hold me very long have not yet been wrought. Hurry, now, and give that note to Vera while I keep his nibs engaged."

Judith turned away without replying.

"Just a moment more, while I speak to your other prisoner," she said to the constable as she passed him. "Mr. Beverley wishes to say something to you. I won't be more than a moment."

The man passed her and went to Beverley's cell. Judith hurried to the only other one that was occupied, for the jail was empty save for those two.

She offered no word of greeting to the woman behind the bars as she passed the hastily written note to her, and the woman took it without comment; took it and read it quickly and wadded it into a ball and passed it back again, while a cold



smile gleamed in her big, baby-blue eyes. She had been called startlingly beautiful, and that expression best described her. Vera's face was almost angelic in the outward and seeming purity and innocence that was depicted in every line and expression of it. Her hair was the color and had the luster of spun brass; her eyes were heavenly, and her lashes drooped over them like opalescent curtains to hide their brilliancy—unless she chose to make use of it. "Startlingly beautiful" exactly described her in feature, in form, in voice, and in every motion of her graceful body; in the luxurious texture of her sunlit hair, in the poise of her shapely head, in her ivory-white throat and swelling bust; in her slender waist and delicate hands and tiny feet; in the witchery of her smile whenever she chose to put warmth and enticement into it.

Not a word was exchanged between them. Two minutes after the wadded ball of paper had been returned to Judith she was outside of the jail in the sunlit street, walking rapidly toward the railway station.

She had a full half-hour to wait for the train, and after she had purchased her ticket and checked her trunk she seated herself in a corner of the tiny waiting room, for the station was a very small and ordinary one.

Her ticket read through to Richmond; so did her trunk-check, although she had no idea of traveling

that far by that particular train. Her plans, made while she bathed and dressed at the hotel, were not so simple.

At the moment she was chiefly concerned in hoping and praying that the 3.45 express would not be late, and that nothing would have happened to fetch Fayban and Champ Lee—and possibly Boone Pendleton as well—away from the island and bring them to Jasper Center before it had arrived and taken her out of immediate danger.

In reality, however, she thought very little about Fayban, or the express train, or of the emergency that confronted her, while she sat there in her corner of the waiting room, motionless, rarely even lifting her gaze from the knot-strewn planks of the floor.

Boone Pendleton, and the memories of him, filled her thoughts.

The touch of his hands, the warmth in his eyes, the feel of his lips against her own, the sound of his voice, the gladness and happiness in his laughter, the magnetism of him and her love for him—and his love for her—supplied all that she cared to think about during that half-hour of waiting.

It would have seemed endless otherwise; as it was, it passed all too quickly. Dreams of love are ever alluring. Time is forgotten when one is absorbed in them.

So the half-hour flew past on swift and silent wings until Judith was brought up standing and startled by the shrill whistle of the locomotive.

She went to the door of the waiting room and looked outside. Directly across the tracks in front of her, up the hill and not more than a few furlongs distant, was the hotel that she had quitted. Behind her, somewhere beyond the woods of pine and scrub-oak, was the swamp that she had crossed in the motor boat; and down that way also a traveled roadway led into the swamp and across it when it was dry.

Something impelled her to turn her head toward the left just at the moment when the train rolled in at the station platform, and she gasped and caught her breath and put her free hand to her throat in a spasm of sudden, overpowering alarm.

Boone Pendleton, with Fayban at one side of him and Champ Lee at the other, had just stepped upon the end of the platform, and the three were walking slowly toward her.



Judith put her free hand to her throat in a spasm of sudden, overpowering alarm

CHAPTER X

CROSS PURPOSES

JUDITH, in her tailor-made suit and sailor hat with the filmy, concealing veil wound around it and stretched tightly over her features, with the small seal handbag in one hand, and a rolled magazine that she had purchased at the hotel and forgotten, in the other one, appeared not at all like the girl in the riding habit and hat who had fled from Pendleton's bungalow a few hours before. She looked the part of the tourist as she passed swiftly across the platform and sprang upon the step of the Pullman at the very instant that the train came to a stop.

The men saw her, all three of them, but none of them recognized her, and the train began to move again before they passed the steps of the Pullman where she had entered it.

It was the rear car of the train, and Judith went to the door and looked back, as the station was left behind—and sighed with relief when she saw the three men walking calmly onward without so much as a second glance after the departing express.

Boone Pendleton was too much disturbed in mind to notice things, just then; otherwise his love might have divined what his eyes could not penetrate; otherwise he might have recognized Judith by her lithe and graceful motions when she crossed the station platform so swiftly and mounted the steps of the car.

Caesar had found a leaky scow for the three men, in which they had managed to paddle across the swamp, but they had landed at the roadway that crossed it in dry times, a quarter of a mile away from the place where Judith had abandoned the launch.

None of the men had seen it as they approached the shore. Not one of them had an idea that Judith would be in Jasper Center, or had been there. She had merely made her escape in the launch, and landed somewhere, and lost herself in the woods, and would presently be found again; such, at least, was the consensus of opinion with them.

That was why Boone was so greatly disturbed and ill at ease.

He could picture to himself a thousand dangers which Judith might, even then, be encountering. The swamps, and the ground under the trees in the woods, were boggy and treacherous in that section, after the heavy rainfalls. The trees themselves were uncertain and often, by their own weight,

pulled their roots out of the softened soil, and fell without warning. And there were places where there were quicksands; and the woods stretched away in all directions, miles on miles, where one who is unaccustomed to them gets hopelessly lost—and starves, perhaps—and there was Judith's ankle, not yet fit for walking, and. . . . The sum and substance of it was that Boone Pendleton was savagely and angrily distressed.

Also, he was helpless.

He could not go alone to search for Judith. Fayban was quite frank in his belief that her escape from the bungalow had been a put-up job, and that Boone's concern about her was play-acting. He had not a doubt that they had fixed upon a place of meeting, and that they intended to meet there, wherever it might be.

"I'm going to stick to you, Pendleton, until the girl has had time to get lost in the woods and swamps, and starve—or to make her getaway," he had announced unqualifiedly before they came away from the bungalow.

The three came to a stop at the cross street on which the jail was located; that is, Champ Lee, the constable, stopped, and the others did likewise.

"I reckon I'll step over to the jail an' see Rufus," he said. "More'n likely he ain't had no chance to git his dinner, 'nless 'twas brought to him."

"Shall we go with him, Pendleton?" Fayban in-

quired. "You know I'm not going to let you have an opportunity to lose me. I can't put you under arrest—I wish I could—because I haven't sufficient proof. But all the same——"

"Oh, come along," Boone interrupted, and himself led the way toward the jail.

"Possibly it will interest you to see the husband of Elanor," Fayban remarked with ungracious irony, overtaking him. "I haven't any doubt that he will be interested to see *you*; particularly if I decide to tell him that she has been alone with you in your bungalow more than a week; and that you——"

Boone halted in his tracks, and the expression in his eyes compelled the other to leave his sentence unfinished.

"Fayban," Boone said, hotly, "if you make one more insinuation of that sort, you'll regret it—if you live long enough. You've got a decent streak in you, and you have got a rotten one. You'd better keep the latter one under cover while we are together."

For a moment the two men stared straight into each other's eyes. Then Fayban's wavered, and a slow flush stole into his face.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Pendleton," he said, and it was evident that he was sincere.

"And the lady's also, if you please, Fayban," Boone replied, grimly, unmoved as yet.

"And the lady's, likewise," Fayban added. Then he smiled, and the best that was in him came to the surface. "Look here, Pendleton," he went on—the constable had gone on ahead of them—"I'd like to shake hands with you, and be friends. I'm only doing my duty. Your Southern sense of honor will tell you that I've got to do that—won't it?"

"Yes. Only, don't go beyond it, Fayban."

"I won't, again. Now will you shake hands and be friends?"

"No. Not yet. When you have made up your mind that I have told you the truth, and that I had no idea of the lady's intention of leaving the bungalow, I will."

"I believe that much, now, Pendleton; but I also believe that you have a pretty clear idea where to look for her, if I should leave you to yourself, so——"

Boone turned abruptly and started away from the jail toward the general direction of the hotel. Fayban gazed after him, hesitated a moment, and then went into the jail. Lee, and the man he had designated as Rufus, were in earnest conference when he joined them, but not a word was said about Judith's call there, and it is doubtful if Rufus had mentioned it to his brother officer.

"Well, friend Fayban, how now?" Beverley greeted him, laughingly, when he stood before the cell. "Have you, by any chance, brought in a third

prisoner, and could you, also by any chance, tell me when we may hope to exchange these cramped quarters for the luxury of a Pullman?"

"You'll get no Pullman in yours, Beverley. A day-coach will do for you."

"Unkind, most unkind, I call that. And the lady? Must she, too, be deprived? Fayban, you're a beast—really"; and Beverley indulged in a hearty laugh when a flush of anger reddened the officer's face. "You must not take me too seriously—not always," he added.

"Look here, Bud, I want you to tell me something."

"I have no doubt that you do. But—only something, my dear fellow? Aren't there a lot of things that you'd like me to tell you? Eh? Really?"

"No—not just now. Only this one, for the present. And it has nothing whatever to do with the charges that lie against you. It is——"

"That *lie* against me! Ye gods! Man, man, the truth will out, even from the lips of an operative. The charges that *lie* against me. Thanks, my dear chap; thanks, awfully."

"Oh, shut up, and stop your guying. You know what I mean well enough."

"What is it, my most worthy exponent of the law, that you would have me reveal?" Beverley asked, a quizzical smile on his lips, dancing humor in his remarkable eyes.

"I want to know which one of those two women is your wife."

"Now, hark!" Beverley exclaimed, his smile becoming even more pronounced. "Quoth the minion of the law: 'Which of these two women belongs to you?'"

"On the level, Bud, I'm in earnest. I want to know. Stop your guying, and tell me. It cannot hurt you, nor influence the case against you; and—it may help one of them."

"Which one, Fayban?"

"The one who is not here. Elanor."

"But how? Why?"

"Look here, Beverley," Fayban said, ignoring the questions, "I'll tell you something."

"Well?"

"I have seen Elanor since I started out in pursuit of her. I found her—but she managed to give me the slip again. She got away from me and I don't know where she is."

"Where did you find her? Where was it that she escaped from you?" Beverley spoke quite earnestly; Judith had told him nothing of her experiences during the past week.

"I am wondering whether I should tell you that," Fayban replied with delicate craft. He would not have been an operative in the service he was in if he had not understood how to work upon human

foibles. "If she is your wife, I had better not tell you. If she is not——"

"Well, and if Elanor is not my wife—What then?"

"Oh, what is the use of argument? She is, or she is not. You will tell me, or you will not. My private opinion is, that you are not married to her—perhaps not to Vera, either."

Beverley laughed aloud. "Oh, perhaps I am married to both," he said, still laughing. "Why not make a Mormon of me, Fayban, and have done with it? They still practice polygamy out there—on the quiet—I am told. Suppose we leave it that way, old chap; for I will confess to you, on the level, that both women belong to me."

For a long minute Fayban stared into Beverley's eyes. Then he said:

"I found her, Bud, in a bungalow, on the other side of the big swamp. It is a lake, now, and the floods have made an island of the place where I found her. She was staying there with a man. They were alone, those two, and had been alone together since the rain began, and made prisoners of them—more than a week ago. The man is young, and handsome, and rich. He is a fine fellow, of a splendid family, and—during the seven or eight days that they have been together he has fallen so desperately in love with her that he doesn't know where he is at."

Fayban paused, his eyes fixed intently upon Beverley's.

"Go on," the latter told him. "Since you have begun by carrying tales, bring me all of them. What more is there?"

"This: She is just as deeply in love with him as he is with her—if I can see through a millstone with a big square hole in it."

A glint of hardness had stolen into Beverley's eyes. The smile still lingered about the corners of his mouth, but it was there from the force of habit, not from amusement.

"Who is the man? What is his name?" he asked.

"I won't tell you that," Fayban replied.

Beverley shrugged. "Where is Elanor, now?" he inquired.

"I don't know; but I will find her—to-morrow, or the next day. More than likely she is lost in the woods somewhere. But she can't go very far. She had hurt her ankle, and was walking with crutches when I found her. She stole our launch and got away from us, but I am figuring that she will return to the bungalow with it, as soon as she is satisfied that I have left there."

"Oh. I see." Beverley's eyes were smiling again. "I think I understand you. You have brought the owner of the bungalow here with you. To-night, or in the morning you will go back there

expecting to find Elanor; and in the meantime my poor Vera and I must languish here in jail awaiting your good pleasure. And you have thought to excite jealousy in me by telling me this tale. Fay-ban, old chap, it's too thin. It doesn't work."

CHAPTER XI

WHEN FAYBAN LOST HIS TEMPER

"MR. FAYBAN! Please!"

Vera's voice was as attractive as her personality, and Fayban, who would have gone from the jail without speaking to her, stopped as he was about to turn toward the street door, hesitated for the briefest instant, and went to her.

Truth to tell, Fayban was a very susceptible person behind the hardness and practicality of his profession, and he was conscious of the fact that he was just a little bit afraid of Vera's alluring and enticing beauty and witchery. He was a gentleman, also. Pendleton had spoken only the truth when he said that there were two streaks in the operative: a decent one, and—one that was not. But the latter one was assumed, and wholly artificial.

Vera's cell was as large as two of the others, and was comfortably furnished. A screen that projected half way across the corridor shielded it. She was seated upon the cot that served also as a bed when Fayban responded to her summons.

Her face as she looked up at him seemed pale

and drawn and a bit haggard, and yet it had lost none of its beauty and charm; rather were both augmented by the distress from which she so evidently appeared to be suffering.

"You are ill," he said at once.

"Yes," she replied, and left the cot to move painfully nearer to him. She grasped the bars of the cell door and clung to them. No one could have doubted that she was suffering, and at the same time making a heroic effort to overcome her pain. "Will you be so good as to send a physician to me?"

"Certainly; at once, madam. And, if he advises it, you shall be taken to the hotel, or to Champ Lee's house, for the night."

"Oh, no." She tried to smile at him—and succeeded; and the witchery of her gripped him. "It is not so bad as all that. I am here. I will remain. I do not wish to face the staring eyes of the guests at the hotel. And"—another wan and fascinating smile and a pathetic gleam from her baby-blue eyes played upon his soul—"I know what the trouble is. I have had it before. I am comfortable, here—as comfortable as I can expect to be while this terrible charge is hanging over me, Mr. Fayban."

"But, madam——"

"But, if you will send a doctor—if you will tell him to give me what I require—you see, I need

it badly. Do you guess? Come nearer and I will confess it to you. Feel my pulse, and you will understand." She thrust one beautiful, half-bared arm between the bars, and Fayban took it, and held it, and thrilled with the contact—as she had meant him to do. "Put your ear close to me. I must whisper it. So." Her breath fanned his cheek. Her lips brushed the lobe of his ear when she whispered: "Morphine."

Then, as one who beguiles—in reality Vera was as free from the uses of any drug as Fayban was—she reached between the bars with her free hand and patted his cheek as a morphine user might have done to win his consent to the procurement of it.

Fayban caught his breath, released her wrist, and stepped quickly backward.

"I did not know," he said, lamely. He was greatly shocked by the revelation. "Yes, I will find a doctor and send him to see you; and I will tell him—er—what you need. Only, I will tell him also to give you very little of it."

He was turning away, but she called to him again. He stopped.

"Are we—to leave here—to-day?" she asked. "Because—really—I don't think that I will be well enough to——"

"No. Not to-day; not until to-morrow," he replied, and left her.

When he had gone, when the clanging of the outer door convinced Vera that she and Beverley had the place to themselves, she laughed aloud.

"He is dead easy, Bud," she called out to her companion. "If I could get him inside of the cell for ten minutes, I'd make him take me out of it and escort me to the station and put me on a train."

"Sure thing, Vera," Beverley called back to her. "The only trouble about that would be that he wouldn't take me out, too."

"No." She laughed again. "He would send you away for forty years—if he could."

"Yes; to get rid of me." Beverley's answering laugh contained a harsh note. "And in less than forty hours he would be thoroughly sick of his job."

"Bud?" she called to him again after a moment of silence.

"Yes?" he replied.

"I had a good notion to tell him about Nell. My ears are good. I could hear all that was said between you. But—it would have spoiled our get-away to-night."

Beverley made no reply. Presently she went on:

"Nell brought the tools to you, didn't she?"

"Yes. You know that," Beverley answered, brusquely.

"How long will it take you to get us out of here, once you begin work?"

"Half an hour, or an hour. I don't know how hard these bars may be, yet."

"Well, I'll make that doctor give me some morphine when he comes. Fayban will tell him that I must have it. When one of those old geezers brings my supper, I'll send him to the hotel for some Scotch ale. That is bitter enough to disguise the taste of the drug. I'll give him a bottle of it—after I have opened it. See? He'll sleep, all right, after he has swallowed it."

By all of which it will be seen that kind fortune was favoring Judith in her flight from Jasper Center. Delay in the pursuit of her was what she prayed for.

When Horace Fayban, secret service operative, turned aside at the cross street and went to the jail instead of to the hotel, he avoided the only opportunity he could have had to intercept her, for, although her ticket and her trunk check were taken to Richmond, she had not the slightest intention of going there. When he engaged in the conversation with Beverley, and later with Vera, more time was afforded Judith; and when he went out from the jail and sought a physician, there was still more delay.

In the meantime Judith was carrying out the plans she had made.

The train had not gone twenty miles when she summoned the Pullman conductor as he passed along the aisle, and, lifting her veil, smiled upon him while she said, ingratiatingly:

"Women are privileged to change their minds without warning, aren't they, conductor?"

"I believe so," he replied, returning her smile, and thoroughly aware of her charm.

"Thank you. I have changed mine since I came aboard of the train. I wonder if you will be good enough to tell me how to manage the change?"

"I'll try," he assured her.

"Very well. That is good of you—very. Here is my ticket—to Richmond; and here is my trunk check—also to Richmond. There is a junction somewhere near us, isn't there, where you connect with a train that goes to Norfolk?"

"Yes. We are due there at 5.43."

"Thank you. Now, I don't want to go to Richmond, but I do wish to go to Norfolk. I do not mind the loss of the ticket, at all. I suppose, later, I can send it to the company, and have it redeemed—if I don't forget it."

"Yes. Certainly. I see. I understand. You wish to leave this train at the junction, and to have your trunk put off there, too, so you can re-check it to Norfolk. Is that the idea?"

"Yes, please."

"That is very easily arranged. Let me have

your ticket and your check. I will take them to the baggage car and fix it for you."

"Thank you so much, conductor; and—will you give this"—she handed him a two-dollar bill—"to the man in the baggage car?"

When Fayban, at Jasper Center, was ascending the steps to the hotel after sending a physician to see Vera at the jail, Judith was descending from the Pullman car at the junction, eighty miles away, and she saw her now checkless trunk as it was lowered to the station platform at the forward end of the train. The courteous conductor had told her that she would have ten minutes to wait, so she went at once to the ticket office, where she made several inquiries, and took a ticket for Norfolk; and thence she sought the baggage room, where she checked her trunk. But not to Norfolk: to still another junction of railroads, at which she arrived at half past nine that night, and for which the conductor of the second train had provided her with a stop-over. Thus, by ten o'clock, Judith was safely installed in a third Pullman, her trunk, again re-checked, was forward, in the baggage car, and she was speeding at the rate of fifty miles or more an hour toward the city of Washington. She believed, too, that Mr. Horace Fayban would encounter some genuine difficulties in tracing her.

Fayban, having ascended the steps to the hotel at 5.40, or thereabouts, halted at the top of them

and searched the piazza with his keen eyes for sight of Pendleton.

He was nowhere to be seen, so Fayban made inquiries at the desk.

The managing clerk was behind it, and—"Oh, yes," he told the operative. "I know Mr. Pendleton very well indeed. No, sir, he has not been in the hotel this afternoon; at least I have not seen him, and I am sure that I would have done so had he been here.

"Bing!" Fayban said to himself as he turned away from the desk with a grim smile on his face. "He has given me the slip, too. And he has gone to find that girl. Where?" he asked himself as he halted again at the top of the piazza steps. "It was a plant after all, of course, her swiping the launch and getting out of sight; and as a matter of course she would go back to the bungalow the minute I was gone from it."

He strolled down the street, thinking deeply. Soon it would be dark, and he wanted very much to get back to Pendleton's bungalow before night, if he could manage it. The small lake which was part of the hotel's advertised attractions contained many boats. It, like the nearby rivers, had overflowed its banks after the rains, and it and the big inundated swamp were now all one. He hurried toward the boat house.

"You had two gasoline launches when I was

here this morning," he told the keeper of it. "I want the other one, now, and you with it, to run it. We will bring back the first one. I wish to go again to——"

"Sorry, sir," the man interrupted. "Mr. Pendleton done took de las' one an hour an' a half ago."

"He did, eh? Well, you've got a boat of some sort that you can row, haven't you? I'll give you five dollars if you will get me to Pendleton's bungalow before dark. Can you do it?"

"I reckon so, sir."

Thus, Judith was given still more time, for Fayban talked with nobody who could tell him that she had been there and had gone away again.

It was almost dark when Fayban arrived at the bungalow the second time. There was dismay in his eyes as he looked upon it, for he knew at once that his quest was fruitless.

The house was closed and locked. The solid wooden shutters had been replaced over the windows. Pendleton had been there, and gone away again, and, doubtless, had taken the girl with him. Very well, he would get after Pendleton. There was evidence enough against him, now, surely. He recalled that there was an automobile somewhere, and that the negro, Caesar, had brought gasoline to the bungalow that morning, so he started down the hill toward the highway in search of the car.

But he did not find it. He came upon the place where it had been stalled, but it was not there. Some burlap bags scattered about the roadway told him how it had been helped out of the ruts; that was all.

Mr. Horace Fayban, secret service operative, was very angry with all the world, just then—but with himself most of all.

CHAPTER XII

A PORTENTOUS ENCOUNTER

PENDLETON had told Caesar to wait at the bungalow for his return, and Caesar waited.

When Boone turned away from Fayban in front of the jail it was his intention to go to the hotel, but the thought that Judith might be at that very moment lost in the woods that surrounded the submerged swamp and the little lake that adjoined it gripped him. He turned aside and sought the boathouse. He believed that Judith would return to the bungalow, if she could, as soon as she discovered that Fayban and the constable had gone from it.

He took nobody with him in the little launch he hired, and, instead of heading direct for the nearest point to his bungalow, he skirted the shore, searching it with his eyes for a sign of the boat in which Judith had made her escape.

He discovered it almost at once, for it was beached less than half a mile from where he guided his own craft into the submerged swamp from the lake.

A great light broke upon him when he examined it, and had found the imprints of her crutches in the path and followed them to the edge of the wood.

He stood there for a time, pondering; and he surmised very nearly what she had done after she entered the hotel by the back way. He figured it out that perhaps she had found her things, changed her attire and—— And then he remembered the figure he had seen crossing the station platform toward the Pullman car of the 3.45 express.

Instantly he knew that it was Judith he had seen, and he wondered, in profound amazement, why he had not recognized her at once.

The memory of her swift motions when she crossed the platform returned to him. Judith? Of course it was Judith! He had known her, even then, only his mind had been so disturbed by his fears for her safety that he had not realized that he did recognize her.

He thought for a moment of going to the station and making inquiries about the ticket she had purchased, but a second thought reminded him that such questions might help to put others on her trail, and he dismissed the idea at once.

There was not another train out of Jasper Center in either direction that night. But there was his stalled car over at the bungalow, or near it, partly cleaned; and there was gasoline, and old Caesar

was waiting for him, and down at the lower fork of the south road the water had no doubt subsided enough by that time to make it possible to drive his car through it.

He lost no time in returning to his launch after that decision.

Caesar was waiting at the bungalow when he got there. Two hours at least, probably three, must elapse before Fayban could possibly get to him, and the time was amply sufficient—as it proved to be.

Twice, after he had succeeded in starting his car, he was stalled, but Caesar had stowed away more of the burlap bags for just such an emergency, and he got out, both times, with very little delay.

He had been right about the water at the lower fork of the south road. He dashed through it and up the steep hill at the opposite side, and was at last on a solid, made roadway, away from the clay mud, and—free to take up his search for Judith.

It was absurd—he confessed that much to himself—but he somehow knew that he would find her. The love that pulsed and throbbed and clamored within him, and the love that he knew she felt for him, would bring them together out of the vastness, like the attraction of two powerful magnets that are inevitably bound to meet. He would find her somewhere, somehow; and meanwhile he would send word to the postmaster to have his mail for-

warded. That Judith would send some word to him as soon as possible he did not doubt.

To Horace Fayban and what he might choose to do when he discovered that Pendleton had gone away in the car he gave not a thought.

It was nearly six o'clock when he succeeded in starting, and his progress was necessarily slow. He was almost three hours in making the ten miles to the lower fork of the south road, and forcing his car through the water to better going. It was after eleven when he drove into the little village of Turton, and roused the proprietor of the small inn. He had discovered that he had an appetite that needed attention—and also that he was very tired.

Daylight found him astir, however, but he waited two hours while his car was cleaned and put into shape at the village garage.

When, at last, he was prepared to start onward, he hesitated, more than half inclined to regret that he had come away from the bungalow—and very much in the mood to return to it.

After all, the bungalow seemed the most likely place for him to receive word from Judith. And where should he go to seek for her? Richmond? He had seen her enter the Pullman car of the Richmond express. But would she go there?

“No,” he thought aloud, and shook his head as if he were replying to a person in the seat beside

him, "Judith would be quite certain that Fayban would follow her if he could. No; she would not go to Richmond. She would leave that train as soon as she could do so—and that would be—where? I know! At the junction. I will drive there, anyhow, and I'll ask Pete Cranford some questions when I get there—maybe. I'll see."

Every road in that region was as familiar to Boone Pendleton as are the streets of a city to one of its gamins. He knew the main roads, and the byways, the short cuts, the fords (there are few bridges in that locality) and the best going.

At noon he turned from the main highway he was following, into a tree-embowered crossroad that would save him several miles of travel, and he had traversed its winding way for almost half the distance to the turnpike he was seeking, when he came upon a big touring car that had halted directly in front of him.

A man was standing in the road beside it. A woman, with her veil drawn tightly over her features, was in the front seat beside the driver's. The man turned quickly when he heard Pendleton's car approaching, but an enormous pair of racing goggles effectually masked him.

The woman also turned half way around in her seat, and both moved as if they were unduly startled by the interruption; but Pendleton attributed the fact to the noiselessness of his own car, the softness



of the roadway, and the fact that he had come upon them so suddenly from around a bend.

The slight gesture of relief that the man made immediately after the start of surprise might well have been because a rear-end collision had been so narrowly averted. At all events, Boone saw nothing unusual in the circumstance. But, if he had entered the jail the preceding evening with Fayban, and looked upon the prisoners who were confined there, he would at least have recognized the man, despite his goggles, for there was a certain distinguished air about Brotherton Beverley when he stood erect that belonged to him and individualized him apart from other men.

"Trouble?" he called out as he brought his own car to a standstill and sprang out of it to offer such assistance as he might.

"Well, not exactly trouble," the man replied in what Boone thought to be the pleasantest masculine voice he had ever heard. "Intense annoyance would be a more fitting expression. I supposed my tank was full, but I have just discovered that it is empty. Some busybody has stolen my gasoline while my back was turned."

"That is too bad," Boone said, sympathetically, and pondered a moment. Then: "I am afraid that there isn't any place near here where you could get some. I can't recall one short of about thirty miles beyond where we are now. Behind us, Turton is

the nearest place where you could get it, and that is farther still."

"It's a bad fix, eh?" Beverley exclaimed, and laughed. "Particularly as I happen to be in somewhat of a hurry."

His laugh was infectious, and Boone smiled genially in response to it.

"I can give you a lift to the junction if you wish," he said. "That is the nearest place that I know about where you can get any gas, and you could send after your car, or get somebody to bring you back here to get it."

"That is mighty good of you, Mr.——"

"Pendleton is my name. Boone Pendleton."

"Thank you. Mine is Atkins. And this is Mrs. Atkins." Vera turned her head and bowed as Boone lifted his motor-cap in acknowledgment of the introduction.

"It is exceedingly kind of you, Mr. Pendleton, to help us out of our difficulties," she said in the sweetest voice that Boone had ever heard—save one; nothing could quite compare with Judith's voice, with him, just then.

"Not at all," he said. "Not at all. You can ride in the bucket seat beside me, and Mr. Atkins will occupy the rumble; and I shall be very glad indeed to have company. Your car will be perfectly safe here; this cross-road is rarely traveled. I followed it because it is a short cut to the turnpike, and saves

several miles. If you will get down, Mrs. Atkins, and get into my car, your husband and I will push this one to the side of the roadway. Fortunately it is a trifle down grade right here, and I think we can do it quite easily."

"Sure!" exclaimed the pseudo Mr. Atkins.

Vera got down. She came around to that side of the car where Pendleton and Beverley were standing.

The siren impulses within her were beyond her powers of resistance, and greater than her sense of caution. She pushed her veil aside. She drew off one gauntleted glove. She smiled at Boone when she extended that perfectly molded and sea-shell-like hand. Her baby-blue eyes glowed upon him bewitchingly. Her faultless teeth, her wholesomely red lips and girlish face charmed him—and thrilled him, too.

"Thank you so much, Mr. Pendleton," she said, simply, and turned towards his roadster.

Boone caught his breath. "Jove!" he thought. "What a beautiful woman!"

He did not see the frown of annoyance that showed for an instant between Beverley's brows. There was an engaging smile there when Boone turned to help him shove the big car out of the road.

When they returned to the roadster Vera had not readjusted her veil. She was thoroughly aware

of her own beauty and she wanted this stranger to be made aware of it also.

"You had better bring whatever is portable along with you," Boone called out to Beverley. "The car itself and its fixings will be safe enough; but——"

"I've got everything, thank you," Beverley replied as he swung himself into the rumble seat. "I was wondering——"

"Yes?" Boone said when he seemed to hesitate.

"I was wondering if I could hire another car, and go right on, at the place you call the junction. You see, the railroads won't take me where I want to go, and, as I said before, I am in a hurry. That is, I'm not, but Mrs. Atkins is. It's a house party, you know, and if you happen to be married you will understand that a house party is immensely more important than anything else. Do you think that I could do that, as well as send somebody to get my car, and care for it, until I could send back the hired one?"

"I don't know. It is doubtful; but we can try," Boone replied.

He had been adjusting the windshield to protect that wonderful complexion of Vera's. He started the car as Beverley ceased speaking.

"The road will be fine after we get to the turnpike," he said to Vera, glancing at her, and again encountering the witchery of her seraphic eyes.

"Perhaps," he added, speaking over his shoulder to Beverley, "I may be able to take you and Mrs. Atkins to your destination—if it isn't too far away. It will depend." He stopped.

"Oh!" Vera exclaimed, "*that* would be *perfectly* splendid!"

CHAPTER XIII

THE STRANGER IN THE DOORWAY

PENDLETON knew nearly everybody who lived at the junction. Time was, before the other railroad was built, when it had been the nearest railway station to his boyhood home; but even then it was known as "The Junction" throughout the neighborhood, because of two historic turnpikes that met and crossed each other at acute angles at that point.

He conducted his new friends to the small way-side garage that was a development of the last few years, and introduced them.

"This is Mr. Atkins, John," he said to the proprietor. "He ran out of gas and had to abandon his touring car. It is on Upton's cross-road, about a mile beyond Stoney Run. He will explain what he wants you to do for him. Mr. Atkins, this is Mr. Seelover, a lifelong acquaintance of mine. And now, if you will excuse me, please? I'll be back shortly."

"You won't be *very* long away, Mr. Pendleton," Vera said as he turned to go.



"No; I won't be long," he replied.

Boone was wise in making his inquiries about Judith, in that he applied to the baggage master instead of to the ticket agent for his information.

He had two reasons for that. One was that the former was another of his lifelong acquaintances, while the ticket agent was a new man and a stranger to him; the other one was that he recalled that he had seen a solitary trunk being lifted into the baggage car of the train at Jasper Center.

"Pete," he said, after greetings had been exchanged, "do you happen to know if a lady got off of the Richmond express here, yesterday afternoon, and——"

"I do," the baggage master interrupted. "She did. I say it because she was the only passenger that did get off and take the other train. An' say, Mr. Boone, she was a right smart appearin' young woman, too. Lookin' for her, are you?"

"Yes, please."

"Well, she had a ticket fo' No'folk, but she done checked her trunk to Sadler's Junction. Said she was goin' to git a stop-over, theah. I reckon mebby she was goin' up to ole General Masterson's place, though the' ain't nobody theah wo'th seein' as I know of."

"Thank you, Pete."

"Friend of yourn, Mr. Boone? Was she?"

"Yes; a very particular friend."

"Tryin' to give yo' th' slip, eh?"

"Not exactly; but she was trying to give some other friends of hers the slip. So, Pete, if anybody else should make the same inquiries——"

"I won't know nothin' at all about her. Sweetheart of yours, eh." The last was not a question, it was a statement, and it was friendly interest as much as native curiosity that prompted it.

"Yes. My sweetheart," Boone replied, smiling and flushing. Inside of him he was glad to make the confession aloud, and in words. "I'd like you to keep that to yourself, too, Pete."

"Trust me, Mr. Boone. An', say! If she was tryin' to dodge somebody—her daddy, I reckon, eh—she'd be likely to play the same game at Sadler's that she played here. She'd come purty neah to connectin' with th' Washington train, theah."

"When could I get a train from there to Washington, Pete?"

"Not till to-night; not till the one she took—if she took it. You can go cross-lots with that car of yours, an' git there befo' th' train does; or just as soon. I saw you drive it over to John's place. Who's them folks with yo', Mr. Boone?"

"Just acquaintances. How is your tobacco holding out, Pete? Will you buy some with this, and remember me when you eat it? I think you do eat it, don't you?"

"I reckon so. Goin'? Goo'-by, boy. I wish yo'd come back to the ole place to live. How's the colonel? an' how's yo' lady motheh?"—and there were many more of the same sort of question and answer before Boone could get away.

"Well, Mr. Atkins, how goes it?" Boone asked when he returned to the garage.

"Rotten, thank you," Beverley replied. He had removed the racing goggles because there was no fit excuse for keeping them on, but Boone saw only an unusually well groomed, fine looking gentleman in the personality of Brotherton Beverley. He had no suspicion, not the ghost of one, that he stood face to face with the man whom Fayban had denounced as a counterfeiter, and as Judith's husband. "There isn't a car to be had," the pseudo Atkins continued with a shrug and a light laugh, "not even to drive me back there to get my own car. A 'plug-and-a-fix,' yes; but to drive that thirty miles behind a spavined horse that's a hundred years old—— Gee!"

"And I will have to wait in this desolate place in the meantime," Vera remarked, pathetically.

"Perhaps not," said Boone, "if you happen to be going my way. I have already ordered something to eat at the inn across the road. It won't be Willard service, but it will be good. As soon as we have had dinner, and John has replenished the roadster and put it in shape, I'm off for Wash-

ington. You have not told me where you are going, but——”

“Wait a moment, Mr. Pendleton, please.” It was Vera who interrupted him.

She turned to Beverley.

“You threw a hateful slur at me about that house-party when Mr. Pendleton came to our assistance,” she said to him with a delightful little frown and shrug. “I don’t care anything about it; not a thing. So there! I’d much rather go to Washington with Mr. Pendleton—if he will take us with him. And you can send Masters down here to get your car, and we can telegraph for the trunks and things, and—— *Will* you take us to Washington with you, Mr. Pendleton?”

“Thank the Lord!” Beverley exclaimed before Boone could reply. “I’m glad that the car got stalled, since it got me out of that house-party stunt. And, Vera”—the name slipped out before he was aware of it, but he went on, calmly—“you have taken a very great weight from my shoulders.” (She had, indeed. They had left a blind trail behind them, and it would be rendered even more blind in the event that Fayban should find the abandoned automobile, which was not likely. And here was an opportunity to become a party of three, instead of two, and to be taken to Washington in a manner that effectually precluded every chance of their being followed.) Do I understand that you

will take us with you, Mr. Pendleton?" he finished.

"Certainly—if you think that you can stand the rumble seat that far," Boone replied.

"Stand it? I'll sit it, man! I'll be your mechanic—your footman—your errand boy. Come on. Let's eat. I'm starved. What time is it? Two o'clock. When did we eat last, Vera? Yesterday, or the day before? Mr. Pendleton, I'm the happiest man this side of Broadway—because I have skipped that house-party—even if I have lost a four-thousand-dollar automobile; temporarily, of course."

"Do stop talking, Tony," Vera snapped at him. They had started toward the inn. "You make me think that you purposely left the gasoline tank half empty."

"My dear, I assure you——" He laughed aloud, heartily. "Tony!" he ejaculated. "She calls me that, Pendleton, only when she is particularly well pleased with me. Vera, I embrace you; I do indeed—in spirit. You have foregone the fascinations of that house-party so gracefully. But—I suspect—I suspect—that is, I begin to suspect that you would rather sit in that bucket-seat beside Pendleton than to go to it. Beware, Pendleton. I shall be right behind you, in the rumble, all the time." He ended with another laugh that deprived his speech of everything but its humor.

Boone liked Beverley. Everybody did, who saw

his best side. He had an inimitable way with him that won friends wherever he happened to be. He had that faculty which we call magnetic to a remarkable degree.

It was genuine, too. His charm, unlike Vera's, was never assumed and studied; it was natural. His soul bubbled with mirth. He was always merry—save when he was angry; at such times he was dangerous. But they were rare.

Boone thought, as he looked back at him from time to time from the driver's seat, that he might have seen Atkins somewhere before that day, and yet he was almost positive that he had not done so. But sometimes there was an expression in his eyes, or a note in his voice, or a mannerism in his use of words, that struck a familiar chord in his memory; and it puzzled him greatly.

"I wonder," he said to him, late that evening, when they had stopped at a village inn for another meal, "if I have happened to meet you before, somewhere."

"My dear fellow, I heartily wish that we might have met sooner. I feel that I have been defrauded because it did not happen. But, no. I would not have forgotten you—and I very much doubt if you would have forgotten me, old chap. Do I remind you of somebody whom you can't recall? I impress almost everybody in that way. I am a many-sided fellow, Pendleton." He laughed; he

seemed always ready to laugh, heartily, upon the least excuse for it. "Vera calls me Octopus when she is angry at me. She says it's because I have so many feelers. You see, I like to guy people; and when I guy her, she gets cross. Very unreasonable, I call that. 'Laugh, and the world laughs with you.' You know the rest of it. Here we are at last. Now for the feast. Your company, or the Virginia air, or both, gives me a voracious appetite. Pendleton, I wish you could go with us to Dreamland."

"To Dreamland? Where is that?" Boone asked. They had taken their seats at the table. Vera replied to him before Beverley could answer. The suggestion appealed to her. It had not occurred to her before as among the possibilities, nor did she believe that Beverley's remark had been intended seriously. But it attracted and interested her for many reasons.

"It is our country home," she said, "and it is beautiful; at least, we think so. There is nothing grand about it, you know. It's just a simple little place that is hidden away where nobody can find it unless they have specific directions. I wish you *might* go home with us, *really*."

"It would be impossible, just now; thank you all the same," Boone answered; and his thoughts flew to Judith, and his quest for her.

"Go at him, Vera," Beverley put in. "Convince

him. Win him over. Tell him that previous engagements, and business, and affairs of state, are not half so important as to please you. Twist him around your finger the same way you do with me. You'll get him. On the level, Pendleton, I wish you might do it; even if you can't stay with us more than a day or so. You'd find the way, you know, and you could come again."

Beverley was playing to induce Boone to take them to Dreamland in his roadster. It would avoid the necessity of railroads, and, at the last, the hiring of a conveyance for the final lap of the distance; it would effectually avoid the possibility that Fayban could get trace of them again. At Dreamland he knew that he would be entirely safe from pursuit. It was the one place in the world where he felt perfectly secure.

Boone, however, shook his head. If he had known that Judith—— But he did not know.

"I must go to Washington," he said. "I have—— important business there. I am seeking—— But that would not interest you. I may decide to leave there at once; I may, on the other hand, be detained. I cannot tell. I won't know till after I get there."

"Is she very, *very* beautiful?" Vera inquired, archly.

"Very," Boone replied, calmly, and everybody laughed.

"I wonder if Nell has got home yet," Beverley

remarked, more to himself than to Vera, although he was looking directly at her. So was Boone, as it happened, and he saw a quick frown come into her face, and a dark and angry gleam glint from her baby-blue eyes. He wondered who "Nell" could be; and, somewhat vaguely, why the beautiful woman seated at his left should dislike her so profoundly.

Nell, as it happened—Judith as we know her; it was her middle name and she greatly preferred it to Elanor—was, at that selfsame moment, in a stateroom of one of the Potomac river steamboats that leave Washington at six o'clock each evening and poke their noses into every creek along its shores, so that it takes them all night to make a bee-line distance of eighty miles. She had arrived in the Capital City that morning, without further incident, and had passed the day at an obscure hotel, where she had devoted herself to the study of her personal problem—to an effort to determine what her future course should be.

She knew that Dreamland would afford her a safe harbor. There was little danger that Fayban could succeed in tracing her there—unless indeed he could cling to the trail of Beverley and Vera after they had sawed their way out of jail. But she had every confidence in Beverley's ability to outwit the operative, once he was free.

She had not intended to go to Dreamland al-

though she had permitted Beverley to assume that she did. Her plans were quite different. For six months she had been preparing herself for the opportunity that Fayban's activities had forced upon her. She meant to break, forever, from the influences of Brotherton Beverley, and the angel-faced woman whom she hated—and feared.

Yet—so she had argued with herself—there were letters, and keepsakes, and other things of her own at Dreamland, that she very much wanted to have; and Beverley had said that a week or more would elapse before he and Vera would get there—a time which no doubt he intended to use in throwing the sleuths entirely off his track; and so she would have ample opportunity to go there, collect her few belongings, and get away again before they could arrive. After that, oblivion—so far as her former associates were concerned.

Within the stateroom, with the door locked, and with the almost certain knowledge that she was at last safe from pursuit, she relaxed. The strain she had labored under since the moment of leaving Pendleton's bungalow fell away—and left her trembling, and with the suggestion of tears in her eyes, and afraid. Not fearsome of the dangers that had menaced her since the forcible intrusion of Fayban, but that same heart-fear lest the man she had learned to love so devotedly was lost to her.

"Boone! Boone, dear! Please don't hate me; don't despise me; don't stop loving me," she murmured under her breath, with outstretched arms toward the door, as if he were there, and she was pleading with him; and then, as if in response to her appeal, somebody rapped authoritatively against the panel.

Judith gasped. She was frightened. She pressed one hand over her heart in the effort to control her fears.

"It is nothing," she told herself, and tried to smile at her terrors. Then she turned the key and opened the door. A man, an utter stranger, faced her across the threshold.

"Mrs. Beverley, I believe," he said, coldly, stepping forward a pace so she could not close the door against him.

She did not reply. She could not speak. But she was thinking:

"So this is the end. Fayban has found me—through this man—who is but another like him."

And then, on the instant, her courage was restored to her.

CHAPTER XIV

BILLY CORTRIGHT—AND A SHOCK

"You are mistaken," Judith said to the man who faced her in the stateroom doorway, lifting her head proudly and defiantly, and with contempt and scorn and aloofness in her steady voice. "Stand aside if you please. I wish to close this door."

She did close it.

The stranger, whatever his business might have been, stepped backward at her imperious command, and Judith shut the door and locked it on the instant that his foot was withdrawn.

"I beg your pardon," she heard him call out to her from the other side of it. "I meant no offense. You do not remember me, that is all. Will you—please—open the door again and let me explain? I don't want you to think I'm a cad, you know."

"I wonder——" Judith was thinking rapidly although she did not reply.

"Please let me explain, and make proper apologies," the intruder went on, pleadingly, from the opposite side of the closed door. "You have made me feel like—like thirty cents. Honest. I

don't suppose that you'll remember my name any better than my face, but it's Cortright—Billy Cortright. I was properly introduced to you a year ago, even if you have forgotten me; and by Mr. Beverley, at that. At Lake George."

A great sigh of relief was Judith's reply, although the man beyond the door could not know that. She remembered. She turned the key again and opened the door.

"Thank you," he said at once, beaming upon her. "I suppose I was a fool to think that you would remember me; but then everybody does remember me, once they have seen me, just as everybody calls me Billy after they have known me five minutes. I'm so homely and so freckled and so red-headed that they can't forget me, and I never did have enough dignity to be called mister. You see," he went on rapidly, giving her no chance to speak, "I saw you come aboard, but I was talking to a man and I couldn't break away from him on the instant. But I shook him as soon as I could, and dashed after you, and I was just in time to see you go into this stateroom and close the door after you; and I have been walking back and forth past it ever since, hoping that Mr. Beverley would show up, and trying to scrape up courage enough to rap on it and make my presence known—after I made up my mind that he wasn't with you. You remember me now, don't you?"

ame: "Yes," Judith answered. Her relief was so
ly G great, she was so glad that he was not the ful-
a y fillment of her fears, that she felt actually glad
by E to see him again. She remembered him perfectly
as soon as her momentary fright was forgotten.

thor "Gee, but I'm glad of that. You had me going
. S all right when you backed me out of the doorway
open and made me feel as if you thought I was a common
steamboat masher that was trying to scrape up an
acquaintance. I think that I'd have jumped over-
board if you hadn't opened that door again."

s r "Oh, I hope not!" Judith laughed aloud. She
very was so relieved that she wanted to laugh with the
fir joy of knowing that her terrors had been ground-
less.

ver "Won't you come out on the deck, Mrs. Bever-
ley? It's fine outside, and a heap cooler than it is
to in here. It won't be dark for almost two hours
yet. We're almost down to Mt. Vernon. I always
like to look at the fine old place when I go past it.
Come on, Mrs. Beverley. Please do."

I "Yes," she answered, "if you will wait a moment
I will go outside with you"; and because of the
joy she felt in the new sense of security, she gave
him a gladsome smile that brought a flush of
genuine pleasure into his freckled and kindly face.

"I'll wait right here," he replied; "but please
don't be long, will you?"

"No," Judith said, and closed the door. Then

she went to her window and drew back the blind and looked out upon the panoramic shore while she thought out a new problem that had presented itself.

She recalled, perfectly, the introduction to Billy Cortright. Beverley had made it, and possibly he had said "Mrs. Beverley" when he did so. It had long been Vera's whim to confound her identity with Judith's, and she had had two reasons for indulging it. She knew that Judith hated it and inevitably quarreled with Beverley because of it, and—the real reason—*she* preferred to be known as Miss Beverley because it left her free to indulge in her favorite sport: the conquest and subjection of every available man around her.

"Mr. Cortright," Judith said a few moments later when they had found chairs in the shade of the superstructure, "you are still under some delusion in regard to me. I am not Mrs. Beverley. I am——" She hesitated. Should she tell him her real name? Why not? She was determined to break away entirely from the old life. She——

"Oh, I say!" Cortright interrupted her train of thought. "Come now, Miss Bev——. Look here! You're not making game of me, are you?"

"Not at all. When you were introduced to me, you misunderstood, that is all. I am Miss Ralston."

"Miss Ralston?"

"Yes."

"Then who the dickens is Bev——. Oh, say, I beg your pardon. It is none of my business who he is. I had no right to ask such an impertinent question. All the samee, if he didn't say *Mrs. Beverley* when he introduced us, I'm—I was——"

"He said that, when he presented you to the other lady of our party," Judith answered, quietly.

"Nope. Oh, say, forgive me. Gee, but I'm making breaks to-day. Allee samee I'd take my oath that *she* told me she was Miss Beverley, and that you were Mrs."

"Very likely, Mr. Cortright. It gave her more freedom to be regarded as a single woman; and also she knew that it annoyed me, to be thrust into her place and to have her assume mine."

Cortright turned a pair of exceedingly shrewd and penetrating eyes upon Judith. He possessed very much more intelligence than appeared on the surface, but it was only on rare occasions that he permitted it to show. The occasions were still more infrequent when it manifested itself without intention on his part.

"Anyhow," he said, "the name was Beverley. It wasn't Ralston. Pardon me if I am impertinent; but you began it, and now I want to get things straight."

"Certainly. And I want you to."

"Then you were merely a guest in that party. A friend of Mr. and Mrs. Beverley."

"Yes. In a way. Mr. Beverley is—is a relative of mine. I have made my home with him—with them—since I left college, a year and a half ago."

"Oh; I see. I understand, now, I think." Again those shrewd eyes searched into Judith's, but instantly they lightened up with a sunny smile of childlike ingenuousness. "This certainly has been a day of surprises," he went on, holding her gaze. "I'll tell you about it—if you care to hear it."

"By all means, Mr. Cortright."

"First off, early this morning, I saw a lady at the Union Station that I thought, and now know, was you. It was, wasn't it, Miss Ralston?"

"Very likely." Judith bit her lip with annoyance. "I was there. Why didn't you make yourself known to me then?"

"There were several reasons. We will say that I wasn't sure, and didn't have the ga—the courage. You went to the express office—about some of your baggage, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"I had about a thousand things to do to-day—none of them of very great importance. But I happened to be in front of Woodward's store about nine o'clock, and you came out of it and got into a taxicab. Maybe I'd have scraped up courage to speak to you then if you hadn't got away so quick. Then, later in the day, I found that I had to go

down the river on this boat, and, while I was standing on the dock talking with a man I know, who should appear and walk across the plank but you? Gee, says I. One, two, three, and out. It's fate. Then I shakes my friend, and chases after you, and—you slam the door in my face, or words to that effect. Then—well, you know the rest."

"It sounds like quite an adventure, the way you tell it, Mr. Cortright."

"Sure. I only hope that it will work itself out logically."

"Why? How so?"

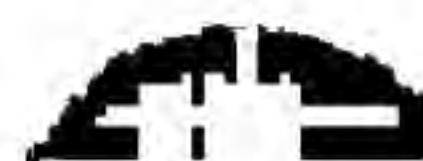
"Well, to turn itself into a perfectly straight all-wool-and-a-yard-wide adventure, predestined by Fate, and all that sort of thing, we ought to be bound for the same destination—down the river, I mean. Not finally. I haven't much hope of heaven at the end of things." He grinned broadly. "But this raggedy old steamboat is taking me to a place called Nomini. Where are you going, Miss Ralston?"

Judith gasped. Her eyes widened. She was startled—although she knew that there was no reason why she should be.

"Don't say that you are bound for the same place," Cortright exclaimed.

"I am," she said, and returned the smile that had crept quizzically into his eyes.

"Well, now, what do you know about that!



Wouldn't that—er—surprise you, and then some! Have you ever been there before? I haven't."

"Oh, yes. Often. But I am going back into the country for quite a distance."

"And I don't know where the dickens I am going, and won't know till after I get there. That's the trouble with my business, Miss Ralston. I never know, when I start out, where I am going to end up. Often, when I eat my breakfast in the morning, I get to wondering where I will get my dinner that same night. And that reminds me: Did you hear that gong? I'm hungry; aren't you? Sure you are. Let's eat. They don't have much variety on this boat, but it's substantial and good. Beefsteak and potatoes, and green peas, and so forth."

"Really, Mr. Cortright, I——"

"Of course, you will have your dinner with me. We're old friends—aren't we? I won't take 'no' for an answer, anyhow."

"Very well," Judith replied, and got up from her chair. "I will go to my room for a moment if you will wait for me."

"Sure. I'll go and wash up a bit, too. I'll meet you right here in ten minutes."

Judith, in her room with the door locked, again opened the blind and studied, unseeingly, the Virginia shore.

It was an annoyance that Mr. Cortright should be bound for Nomini, her own landing place. But,

surely, she thought, their paths would diverge there.

Nevertheless she could foresee that he would be officious in his proffers of assistance in speeding her toward her ultimate destination; with kindly and well-intentioned effort, of course. But it would be none the less an annoyance for all that. She did not want him to find the way to Dreamland. She had no intention that he should do so.

She went outside to meet him, presently, and they descended the stairs to the dining-room.

A few moments later, when the dinner had been served, Judith got the shock of the day.

"I suppose," Cortright said to her—he was cutting his steak and did not lift his eyes—"I have a notion, that because you have been often to that part of Virginia where we are bound, you know everybody in that region; by name, anyway."

"No; I do not know many people down there," she replied, indifferently.

"Well, anyhow, maybe you've heard the name of the man I've got to see, and can give me a pointer about where he lives. I hope you will, if you can. His name is Atkins, and he lives at a place they call Dreamland. Do you happen to know where that is at?"

CHAPTER XV

A MAN OF COINCIDENCES

JUDITH wondered if the consternation she felt had found expression in her eyes—and she began seriously to wonder what Billy Cortright's real business could be. Thus far his principal stock in trade had seemed to be grouped about a fund of remarkable coincidences.

He did not lift his eyes from his plate. The question he had asked that had shocked her so profoundly seemed not to concern him particularly. When she did not at once reply to it, he went on, with scarcely a perceptible pause, still without raising his eyes to hers:

"After all, Atkins is not really a Virginia name, is it? And it isn't likely that you would know about him. But the place where he lives—Dreamland—you might know about that; eh?"

He looked across the table at her, then, smilingly. Every freckle on his homely but genially good-natured face seemed to stand out individually. In every outward manifestation Billy Cortright was the personification of what women call "a very

likable man," and what men call "a bully good fellow."

“I never was in this part of Virginia—that part, rather—where we are bound, Miss Ralston,” he said, when she remained silent; he seemed not to notice her failure to respond. “Machodac Neck they call it, don’t they? And all the farms—they used to call them plantations, you know—have names. I have been told that people down there never say, for instance, ‘I’m going to Murphy’s to spend the day’; they use the name of his plantation instead, and say, ‘I’m going over to Kingcopsico to spend the day.’ That’s right, isn’t it?”

“Why—yes—I believe so, Mr. Cortright.” Judith had found her voice at last, and she was sure that not a trace of her perturbation had shown in her expression when he looked at her.

She was mystified, and puzzled, and vaguely disturbed.

Atkins—Anthony Atkins—was the name that Brotherton Beverley had adopted when he purchased Dreamland and improved it and fitted it up skillfully, so that it might be a safe and sure retreat for him in times of stress. Judith was asking herself what possible business the man opposite her might have with him, when he replied to the question as directly as if she had uttered it aloud.

“This man Atkins, I am told, owns a big place down there—this Dreamland place. He has spent a

lot of money on it, I understand, putting in improvements and modern devices, and all that sort of thing; and is likely to spend a whole lot more. Well—don't you see?—I want to get some of it; and I've got things to sell and services to perform and ideas to suggest that are worth money. You bet! They told me in Washington that a place called Beal's Wharf is the nearest steamboat dock to Dreamland, but that I'd better go to Nomini if I wanted to hire a conveyance to take me there. There's nothing doing in the way of plugs-and-fixes—that's a funny expression to mean a horse and wagon, ain't it?—at Beal's Wharf."

Cortright seemed not to notice that Judith had spoken but once since his introduction of the subject of Dreamland and its nominal owner. She hoped that he would not again ask her to direct him.

He did not. He changed the subject abruptly, referring again to the preceding summer at Lake George.

"It's odd that I should have run across you way down here, after a whole year; but no. It's a little less than eleven months since I met you at Lake George; latter part of July, wasn't it? Rather stupid of me to get you and the other lady mixed, wasn't it? She was the Mrs. all the time, and you were the Miss. You are not with them now, I take it."

"No," Judith replied.

"I don't blame you—if they were in the habit of playing that sort of prank on you. Forgive me, but I've got a hunch that there ain't any love lost between you and Beverley's wife. I thought she had one of the most beautiful faces I ever saw, but, gee! I'd feel just the same sort of admiration for an oil portrait, or a tinted statue done in marble. You're a heap more beautiful than she ever thought of being."

Judith flushed hotly with indignation, but, encountering his smiling and utterly impersonal gaze as he lifted his eyes to hers, she burst into laughter. He had spoken as he would have done had he referred to two horses, or two landscapes, in comparison. He was the sort of man who could say things which, if uttered by another, would have been distinctly insolent; coming from Billy Cortright they were merely interested comments utterly without suggestion.

"You are the most remarkable person I ever knew, Mr. Cortright," Judith said. "You say things that—that——"

"Sure. I know. You see, I'm Billy Cortright—and then some. I was never in love but once, and that once has stuck. I'm in love with Humanity. I like the world, and the people in it. Men and women and children. The composite whole is my sweetheart. Now what do you know about that?"

"I think it is beautiful."

"Sure. So do I. And say! it helps a fellow over a lot of difficult places—if he just discounts the bad, and spreads plenty of nitrate where the good is planted. Now, take Beverley. By the way; what relation is he to you, anyhow? Beverley. Ralston. Half brother, maybe. He's considerably older than you are. I can see a suggestion of resemblance between you. Take Beverley, for example. I liked him—down to the ground. Sure thing, Miss Ralston. But I'd bet a heap that he's got a temper of his own all right, all right. See? Good and bad. Make the most of the good; belittle the bad. I'm not saying that there is any, really, you know; but if he did anything that was really bad, he'd do it more because he wanted to get the bulge on the other fellow than for the sake of being bad. Take yourself——"

"I wish you wouldn't," she interrupted him, quickly.

"Why not? Too personal? Nonsense. I'm Billy Cortright. You'll be calling me Billy before you know it. Everybody does. Hotel clerks, and bartenders, and United States Senators—grocery clerks, and even hoboes; the whole bunch. Honest. *You* couldn't be bad if you wanted to be. It isn't in you. Oh, I can read character all right, all right. That's part of my stock in trade. Nope; you couldn't be bad if you wanted to be. You would

balk and back up, even if somebody built a fire under you to make you go. But——!”

“Well? But——?”

“But you’d stick to a man—or a woman—that you liked, that *was* bad, till—you know—froze over, solid. Let me give you another piece of this steak. I call it mighty good; don’t you?”

Cortright seemed never to care about an answer to his incessant questions.

“I like Virginia,” he said a short time later when they were out on the deck again and he had asked and received permission to light a cigar. “That is, I like the people who live in Virginia. One’s fondness for a locality is wholly dependent upon the folks that live there. Surest thing you know, Miss Ralston. And so I like most places because I like humanity. But Virginia is my long suit. I’ve got a heap of good friends scattered around over the old state; one in particular. But, Lord, you wouldn’t ever have heard of him, and come to think of it I guess his place is across the state line, in West Virginia—or it lies in both states. I don’t remember.”

“I’m afraid that you will not be prepossessed by Machodac Neck, Mr. Cortright,” Judith remarked just for the sake of saying something, “unless you are fond of isolation and ungetatableness. Fredericksburg is the nearest railway station, and that is sixty miles away. In the winter when the creeks



are ice-bound and the steamboats have stopped running and the roads are practically impassable, it is sometimes cut off from the outside world for weeks at a time."

"That's fine. That's when I'd like to be there. I'd have a chance to rest, and when I got up to breakfast in the morning I'd know where I was going to eat dinner. Now take that friend of mine that I was just talking about—Boone Pendleton. He's——"

Judith clutched at the rail where they were standing. She swayed on her feet. The fading scenery went black before her suddenly unseeing eyes. Her heart seemed to miss a throb or two, and then it pounded inside of her like a trip-hammer. She turned and tottered toward the chairs beside the deck-house, and Cortright put an arm around her, and assisted her.

"Great Scott and General Jackson!" he exclaimed. "What's the matter, Miss Ralston?"

CHAPTER XVI

ACROSS THE DISTANCES

THERE were many good and sufficient reasons why Bud Beverley did not wish to visit the city of Washington at just that time.

The department that claimed Horace Fayban as one of its operatives was located there, and Beverley knew perfectly well indeed that Fayban was only one among many others who served it, who would recognize him on sight—who had doubtless been on his trail more than once since suspicion had fallen upon him.

Neither did he wish, conspicuously, to go on to Dreamland—and he knew that he and Vera would become conspicuous the moment that Pendleton abandoned them.

He was thoroughly posted in regard to the “long arm of the secret service.” No one, outside of its actual workings, was better informed concerning its ways and means and methods; and he knew that he was a marked man; that the hunters of men had waited and watched, and had been patient, only because of the lack of sufficient proof against him.

He knew, also, that the incident of his having temporarily outwitted Fayban was of no great importance so far as his own liberty of action was concerned. He might outwit and escape a dozen Faybans, and Uncle Sam would still be hot on his trail.

Twenty-four hours more or less would have elapsed since his escape from the Jasper Center jail by the time Pendleton's roadster could take them into the capital city. Telephone and telegraph wires would have been busy by that time, from Fayban to his chief, and from that executive officer to every local branch, and hence to every individual operative throughout the country; but Beverley was not greatly concerned, even at that. Why? Because he very much doubted if the department, as yet, had collected sufficient evidence and proof to convict him—and he regarded himself as practically safe until that proof was obtained.

That was why he had not taken his arrest seriously. That was why he had assumed—as he had done—that Fayban had acted on his own initiative, and without orders from the chief, when the arrest was made. Fayban was ambitious (so Beverley sized him up) and had tried to put over a bluff. He felt a sort of contempt for Fayban, because Fayban should have known that Beverley was the kind of man who always "called a bluff."

Still, he had no desire for the many attractions of Washington at just that time.

He preferred to wait until this ripple upon the smooth surface of things had subsided; until (as he had not a doubt would happen) Fayban had been "called down" for his precipitate and premature act. Above all, he did not want to give anybody the chance to trail him to his retreat at Dreamland.

Therefore he did want Pendleton to take them there in his car.

When that late supper at the village inn was finished and they left the table, Pendleton suggested that Mrs. Atkins must be very tired, and that possibly they both might prefer to remain at the inn over night and go on to Washington by train in the morning.

But no. Vera would hear of nothing of the sort. She was not tired; no, indeed.

"What time ought we to get there?" she asked him.

"About daylight in the morning, or soon after that," he told her.

"We pass through Alexandria, don't we?"

"Yes."

"Then—I'll tell you. Oh, dear Mr. Pendleton, you have been *so* good to us. You seem like an old friend; you *really* do. And what I am about to ask is—well, it is downright selfish and impertinent of me to even *dream* of asking it."

"Go ahead, Mrs. Atkins," Boone replied, laugh-

ing. He rather liked her italics, and there was no doubt about the exquisite attractiveness of her baby-blue eyes and her pouting lips and her bewitching smile when she made use of them.

"Shall I, *really?*" she asked. They were standing beside the car. Beverley had disappeared for the moment and they were waiting for him. He knew that Vera could make herself irresistible if she chose to do so.

"By all means," Boone answered.

"Then—this: Take us to the hotel in Alexandria. I will go to bed. Tony can go into Washington with you, or not, as he pleases. I shall sleep, believe me. But, that is not the point. You go on to Washington and attend to your business—and *do* manage to get *some* rest, yourself. You *must* need it."

"I probably will need some by that time," Boone said, dryly.

"Well, attend to your business affairs, and get some rest. In the meantime Mr. Atkins will telephone to Masters, our chauffeur, you know, to go after our abandoned car. Also he will send word for our baggage to be forwarded. Then, when your business is settled and you have rested, you come back to the hotel in Alexandria and take us to Dreamland."

"But—my dear Mrs. Atkins, I——"

"Please, Mr. Pendleton, let me finish."

"Pardon me."

"It isn't that I want you to *take* us to Dreamland. It is that I *want* you to *go* there with us—with—*me*. There. I have said it. You can't refuse now, can you, when I put it *that* way?" she entreated.

"I am afraid that I must, Mrs. Atkins," Boone replied, ignoring the suggestiveness of her plea, "but I will tell you what I will do."

"Yes? Well?" eagerly.

"By the way, where is Dreamland? How far is it from Alexandria?"

"Oh, it isn't so *very* far. Never mind that, just now." (It was eighty miles as the crow flies; nearer a hundred by the roads.) "I don't want to *tell* you anything about Dreamland. I want you to *see* it. That is why I am so insistent. We could easily *hire* somebody to take us there. We *can't* go by rail, you know. But it isn't that. We—I—want *you* to go—even if you don't stay with us but *one* night. What were you going to say that *would* do, Mr. Pendleton?"

"Let Mr. Atkins take my car. He could send it back, you know. I probably will not need——"

"No, no, no! I won't listen to such a thing. The idea! We have got cars enough. Mr. Atkins could buy one to take us there, for that matter. It isn't your *car*. I don't care that"—she snapped her pretty fingers daintily—"about the *car*. It's *you*



that I want. My goodness, can't you understand?—or won't you?"

"No," Boone replied soberly. "I don't understand—quite. I don't think that I want to."

A merry peal of rippling laughter, joyous, gleeful, unconfined, was Vera's answer to Boone's solemn utterance.

"Goodness gracious and gracious goodness!" she exclaimed with mock astonishment. "The man thinks that I am flirting with him. Why, I am only a child, Mr. Pendleton, and I like you—*so* much. We both do. I want you to come over into my yard and play. We have no rain-barrel, but we have got a cellar-door; only, I'm afraid there would be slivers in it. Here comes Tony. You need not give me your answer *now*. We will wait until we get to Alexandria; or until you have gone on to Washington. You can telephone to me from there, and then, if you really *can't* go with us we will make other arrangements, and you can come to Dreamland later."

Boone nodded.

"Do you know the road between here and Alexandria, Mr. Atkins?" he asked, as the latter joined them. Vera was already getting into her seat.

"Yes, I think so," Beverley replied. "Want me to drive so that you can take a nap in the rumble? All right. Go ahead. If I'm in doubt, I'll wake you up and ask you."

When the roadster came to a stop in front of the Alexandrian hotel soon after daylight the following morning, Judith, eighty miles away as the crow flies, was crossing the steamboat's plank to the wharf at Nomini.

She looked about her in vain for Cortright, and after she had gone ashore and he did not appear, she decided that he had overslept and would therefore be taken around to the other side of the peninsula into the Machodac river—not very much farther from his announced destination than Nomini.

She was heartily glad that it had happened so. If Cortright had told her the truth, and if he should appear at Dreamland, she had decided that he would find nobody at home. He carried altogether too many coincidences around with him to please her, and, although she liked him—she couldn't help liking him—she was glad to be rid of him. She had explained her conduct of the preceding evening, when he mentioned Boone Pendleton's name, as being a sudden attack of faintness, and he had accepted the explanation with much expressed concern for her. She was glad that he was not in evidence when she left the boat.

Judith had slept very little that night. Billy Cortright and his remarkable coincidences had disturbed and unnerved her.

He had seen her when she came off the train

at the Union Station in Washington. He had seen her again when she came out of Woodward's store, whither she had gone to make a few necessary purchases. He had been standing on the dock when she came aboard the steamboat that had brought her to Nomini. He was avowedly bound for Dreamland to interview "Mr. Atkins," ostensibly to sell something to him; and he had spoken of Boone Pendleton as his good friend. A summary of that string of coincidences had been quite sufficient to render her sleepless. More than all that, she could not rid herself of the notion that she had not seen the last of him.

She would have given anything in her power to bestow, if she could have summoned Boone to her side that morning—if she could have called to him across the vastness of distance to tell him how greatly she needed him.

When she started away on the ten-mile walk to Dreamland her whole mind was upon him, loving him, calling out to him silently from the depths of her soul, longing for his presence and the feel of his arms around her and the warm thrill of his lips against her own. She wanted the courage that his nearness to her would bestow. She wanted him. Oh, how she did want him! His name came to her lips and was spoken aloud, just above a whisper, time after time, while she walked onward, carrying her small black bag. Her trunk had gone to New

York by express. Cortright had been right about her visit to the express office, too. She had determined, even then, to walk the ten miles between the wharf and Dreamland. It would avoid the necessity of publishing abroad the fact of her arrival at Nomini; and she was glad, that morning, to be entirely alone. It gave her the opportunity she craved, to fix her whole soul and mind on Boone Pendleton, and to say his name over and over again, aloud, so that she could hear it.

Eighty miles away, Boone was also glad to be alone.

He wanted to think aloud, in half-uttered sentences, of Judith. He wanted the opportunity to whisper her name; to dwell on it; to thrill with the sound of it—for Boone thoroughly believed in the power of Love to call to Love's mate across the distances.

"Judith," he whispered, while he drove onward, "where are you? Where shall I find you, my Judith? Do you need me? Are you calling to me? Are you utterly alone, and frightened lest your enemies will overtake you? Judith? Judith? My sweetheart? My Judith?"

Was there a condition of telepathy between those two? Perhaps. It is possible. Such things have been known to happen.

One thing is quite certain. This: When Boone had exhausted every possible source of inquiry that

day, and had found not the slightest trace of Judith—after he had sought some rest and tried to sleep, and could not—he called over the telephone to Vera.

“I will take you to Dreamland,” he told her. “I will be there after you in an hour. I would like to start at once, if you don’t mind.”

CHAPTER XVII

SOME THREATENING COMPLICATIONS

PENDLETON brought the roadster to a stop and bent forward over the steering wheel.

"Well, of all things!" he called out. "Billy Cortright! Am I awake, or am I dreaming? Where in the world did you come from, Billy?"

"'Llo, Boone," Billy Cortright answered, grinning so genially that the myriad freckles on his face seemed to sparkle.

He came forward to Pendleton's side of the car and stuck out his hand. Apparently he had not so much as glanced at the woman in the bucket seat beside Boone, or at the other passenger, in the rumble. His whole attention was centered upon his friend. His smile widened into a grin of unmistakable joy because they had encountered each other in that out-of-the-way place. He beamed. One would have thought that he had not noticed that there were others besides Boone in the car.

But Vera had seen him, and remembered him, and had pulled the thick motoring veil across her face before Boone stopped the roadster. She had recognized him with a start of annoyance and fear,

and when he stepped forward toward Boone without even a glance at her, or at Beverley, in the rumble, she began to hope that the two men might exchange greetings and a hand-shake—and part as they had met, right there in the wood-embowered roadway. She remembered also that she and the man behind were *Miss* and *Mr. Beverley*, to Billy Cortright. It would complicate matters if Pendleton should introduce them to him as Mr. and Mrs. Atkins, and if circumstances should compel her to put aside her veil, and Beverley to remove his mask-like racing goggles.

Meanwhile Beverley was thanking his stars that he wore the goggles.

He was smiling, too. Threatening danger always fascinated him. There was a spice about such an event that he liked, and that interested him.

“Billy Cortright, out of all the things that might have happened,” he was thinking to himself; for they had learned to like one another and had been much together at Lake George the preceding summer. “He wasn’t much on names, as I remember. Used to call me Bentley, and Lederly, and heaven knows what else. Maybe he has altogether forgotten Beverley by this time—and it may be that Pendleton will let him go on his way without introducing us.” The circumstance was with him as with Vera—a complication; and, well, if Cortright should remember, Beverley felt quite confident of his own

ability to find a suitable and convincing explanation when the time came.

There was barely a pause between Cortright's "'Llo Boone" and Beverley's ready explanation of the strange meeting.

The two friends clasped hands, and held on, and looked delightedly into one another's eyes; and Boone again demanded, amazedly:

"How in the world does it happen that I find you way down here in Westmoreland county, Billy?"

"Business, old chap. It's always business with me, you know. I came down on the boat night before last, bound for Nomini. I overslept yesterday morning and was carried to another landing around in the Machodac river—only a little farther away from the place I wanted to get to, so they told me. But they lied, Boone, believe me. I spent the day—yesterday—mooning around trying to bribe somebody to supply a conveyance, but everybody's horses and mules appear to be working overtime. Nothing doing. To-day, after making another effort, I started out to find the place on foot—you know me—I got lost." He swept the other two with a quick, impersonal glance. "You're full, I see—that is to say, your roadster is—so I couldn't ask you for a lift even if you should happen to be going my way. But maybe you, or your friends, can direct me to——"

"Nonsense, Billy," Boone interrupted him. "You can sit right here, under the wheel, with your feet on the running-board. Where do you want to go? My friends can tell you how to find it, no doubt. By the way—Mrs. Atkins, let me present an old and very dear friend—Mr. Cortright. Mr. Atkins, shake hands with Billy Cortright. He is 'Billy' to everybody he knows, and probably will be to you by the time you have known him half a dozen hours. I wish you would ask him to go along and have something to eat with us, since we are so near to your place. He is almost always hungry, and I am sure he is now. Eh, Billy?"

"On the level, Boone, I'm hungry enough right now to eat a raw dog."

Thus the blow fell.

Vera had merely murmured an acknowledgment of the introduction when she extended her tiny gauntleted hand. Beverley had said a "Glad-to-know-you, Mr. Cortright," while he shook with Billy, but the pronouncement of it had been drowned in Pendleton's continued comments and question. But the name Atkins had been spoken, and presently they would have to unveil and unmask. Then——

Beverley took the bull by the horns. He burst out laughing, gleefully, heartily.

"Hello, Billy Cortright!" he exclaimed after it; and Vera, taking her cue from him, brushed aside

her veil and bent forward to smile bewitchingly upon the man in the road. Boone swung half around to stare in amazement at Beverley, who was engaged in removing his goggles, and who kept right on talking in the meantime so that nobody else could interpolate a word until he had finished what he had to say—for he knew that moment to be the crucial one.

“Mrs. Atkins and I were only waiting until you and Pendleton had got through with your long-lost-brother love-fest before reminding you that we are old acquaintances,” he was saying rapidly and with the ring of laughter in his voice, “for who could forget Billy Cortright, once having known him? Not I, surely. Nor you, Vera. Don’t you remember Lake George, last summer, Billy? There! Look at me now—if you can take your eyes away from Mrs. Atkins long enough to do it. Remember me? Sure you do. You see, Pendleton,” he went on without an instant’s pause, “the name Atkins didn’t mean anything to Billy when you introduced us. Vera and I were bothered to death last summer by a pair of spongers—hangers-on—a man and a woman—a regular out-and-out pair of social grafters they were—who had followed us about from place to place. We tried three separate times to shake them, without success. We went to the Crawford House in the White Mountains, and they showed up there inside of three days afterward.

We went to The Pines, at Lake St. Catherine, in Vermont, and I'm blowed if they didn't drop in on us forty-eight hours later. We hiked for the Fort, at Lake Champlain, got there in the morning, and those two blessed grafters landed on us that same evening—purely by accident, of course. That was their long suit—accidental meetings; coincidental selections of the same places and hotels. My, but this is a long story; but I've got to explain it so that Billy will understand. Well, that third accidental meeting was the hair that fractured the camel's spinal column. Vera and I put our heads together. We figured it out that the twin barnacles had traced us each time by wire—telegraph or telephone—and so we decided to beat it for Lake George, and to register there under assumed names. Lederly, wasn't it, Billy? Or, Bently. Eh, Vera? Something like that; I have forgotten. Anyhow, we fixed it so that Mr. and Mrs. Grafters could not find us by wire, and thank heaven, we lost them that time. And to tell you the truth, Vera and I rather enjoyed the deception—traveling incog., just like royalty out for a holiday. I remember, too, Billy, that we carried the deception still farther. Vera posed as *Miss Lederly*—or what it— Yes; now I have it—it was *Leverly*. Vera posed as *Miss Leverly*, my sister, and she almost got away with it, too. She would have done it if my really-truly sister had not joined us there a day or so later.

Even after that I guess that you kept it up, Vera, and made everybody think that you were the Miss and Nell was the Mrs. Anyhow, Cortright, you've got it straight now. I am Anthony Atkins—Tony to you—if you like. We are Tony and Billy to one another up there. This fascinating creature in the front seat is Mrs. Atkins, and we live near here, at a place called Dreamland, where we will both be most happy to entertain you just as long as you will stay with us; and I will promise that Mrs. Atkins will not flirt with you as outrageously as Miss Leverly did. Shake hands again, Billy. I'm mighty glad to see you once more."

"Well, now, what do you know about that!" was Billy Cortright's grinning comment. He positively beamed upon all of them, one after another, while he shook Beverley's proffered hand like a pump handle. "Say, Tony—sure I remember you now, name and all—I hadn't any idea that the Atkins I was coming down here to see would turn out to be an old friend of mine. Fact, old chap. You are the gazabo I was looking for—you and that place of yours that you call Dreamland."

"Really, Billy? That surprises me. I am not very well known around here. I don't mix much with the neighbors. What did you happen to want to put across on Mr. Anthony Atkins?"

Billy Cortright chuckled while he established himself on the running-board.

"Go on, Boone," he said. "Let's find those eats. I'm famished. It's after three right now and I haven't fed my face since half past five this morning." Then, as the car started onward, he called out to Beverley: "I've got a gold brick that I want to sell to you, Tony—that is, I was going to try to sell it to the progressive Mr. Atkins, who, so rumor has announced to my firm, has been spending a lot of money on his country seat, beautifying and improving it. I'll unfold the whole song and dance to you later."

"All right. Take your time," Beverley called back to him.

After that Boone and Billy conversed together, asking one another where each had been, and what each one had been doing since the time of their last meeting, and they at once became absorbed in the questions and replies that passed rapidly from one to the other and back again.

Vera turned half around in her seat toward Beverley, with her back to Boone.

"I wonder," she said, "if Nell is at Dreamland."

"Very likely," was the reply.

"She will be—rather surprised, don't you think?—when she discovers that Mr. Cortright is with us?"

"No doubt, my dear; no doubt," Beverley answered, shrugging and smiling and winking an eye at Vera. He perfectly understood the significance

of her questions. It was up to him to get into the house before Nell (Judith, of course) should appear at the door to greet them. It was up to him to put her wise to the circumstances before she could have an opportunity to burst upon the scene and make some sort of a "break" that would dump their carefully prepared chestnuts into the fire. But Beverley had already determined exactly how he would forestall all such possible unfortunate happenings.

But neither he nor Vera could figure on another contretemps that was to occur—for the very good reason that they had no idea that the girl, who was even then at Dreamland, and the man who drove the car that was so rapidly taking them there were known to each other.

They could not guess that the man under the steering wheel was the individual to whom Fayban had referred when he told Beverley where Judith had stayed during that week of absence from Jasper Center. Beverley would have felt much less confident about the outcome of existing conditions, and Vera would have been in a panic had they known.

Nor did Boone Pendleton have any idea that he was driving his roadster as unerringly toward his Heart's Desire as a rifle bullet speeds for its target; nor did Judith, at Dreamland, suspect that Beverley and Vera were so near, and that they were bring-



ing with them not only the man of so many astonishing coincidences, but, also, the man she loved.

The two all-powerful magnets of love were inevitably drawing them together across the distances to read again "Life's meaning in each other's eyes."

Twenty minutes later Boone Pendleton brought his roadster to a stop before the door beyond which Judith awaited, all unconsciously, his arrival.

CHAPTER XVIII

IN JUDITH'S ROOM

JUDITH was in her room when the humming sound of the approaching car startled her out of her reverie and brought her to her feet, standing, tense and frightened.

She had been day-dreaming. There had not been an hour during the almost two days since her arrival when she had not fallen into that beatific state of semi-consciousness while her thoughts reached out for her heart's love, wondering where Boone might be, calling voicelessly to him to come to her, speculating if he were seeking her, recalling and in a sense realizing again his last embrace—his last kiss. The memory of it made her thrill and throb with joy.

The car was close at hand before she heard the sounds of its approach. It stopped before she had collected her wits sufficiently to run to a window from which she might see it and its occupants.

It did not occur to her that Beverley and Vera could have arrived so soon. Beverley had told her that a week or more might elapse before he could

get there by the roundabout dodging route that he had then thought he would be compelled to follow.

Her thoughts flew to Cortright, apprehensively. He had announced his intention to find Dreamland and its owner, one Anthony Atkins. "Very well," she thought. "The doors are locked. There is no outward evidence that the house is occupied. I have warned the negroes against his arrival. Let him go away again, as he came. He can——"

The train of her thought ceased abruptly. She heard a door bang shut on the floor below. Footsteps sounded on the stairs, taking two steps at a time, and they came rapidly along the hall toward her own door. She recognized the rhythmic fall of them.

"Beverley!" she breathed, staring toward the closed door and awaiting its opening. "Oh, why did I not go away from here this morning as I intended?" Her hand clutched at her throat. Then, with an effort, she dropped it to her side. She straightened. Her eyes glowed with pride and purpose. She was herself again, and fearless.

The door flew open. Beverley appeared at the threshold.

"Bully!" he exclaimed, and closed it after him. He went swiftly to her and took her in his arms, kissing her forehead. "My little Nell-girl," he said with a cadence of tenderness in his voice that no one but Judith was ever permitted to hear. "Kiss

me," he added, and bent forward so she could brush her lips against his cheek. "We made good time, Vera and I, by an extremely happy accident—several of them, in fact," he went on, moving away from her and leaning his elbow on the mantel, his right foot lifted to the rung of a convenient chair. "I'll tell you all about it, later. Who do you suppose we picked up at the roadside a little while ago? Eh? You couldn't guess in a thousand-and-one years."

"Then I won't try," Judith answered, and smiled upon him. It was the first time she had spoken since he entered the room.

"Do you remember that red-headed, freckled-faced guy we met at Lake George last summer—Cortright? The chap that wanted everybody to call him Billy?"

"Yes," Judith replied, and waited.

"He is downstairs now—he, and another fellow by the name of——"

"Do you mean that you have brought *two* strange men to Dreamland with you, Beverley?" she interrupted him before he could mention the name. "That isn't like you."

"No; it isn't. But, you see, I couldn't avoid it. We picked Cortright up on the road just a few miles back. I suppose you remember that he calls himself an electrical engineer, and a landscape doctor, and several other things, and will sell you any-

thing from an incandescent bulb to a portable twelve-story building. Well, he was looking for Dreamland, and a man named Atkins, and when we were introduced——”

“Introduced?”

“Yes. Vera was wearing her thick veil, and I had on those racing goggles, so he did not recognize either of us when the car stopped and he and Pen——”

“Were you so foolish that you stopped the car when you saw him?”

“Great Scott, Nell, I wish you’d stop interrupting, and asking questions. I wasn’t driving the car. It isn’t my car; that went back on us when we were forty or fifty miles out from Jasper. Vera and I were up against it, too—hard. But a total stranger showed up a few minutes afterward, and—well—Vera has been working her charms on him ever since and the result of it is that he has brought us all the way home. *He* saw Cortright in the road, and knew him, and stopped to shake hands. Then Cortright sprung the ‘I-got-lost’ gag, and wanted to be told where to go. That was what brought about the introduction; and when he heard the name Atkins, lo and behold it was Atkins he was seeking. There you are, Nell. Vera and I had to make the best of it. She threw back her veil and I took off my blinders. Then we both laughed at him and

reminded him that we were old acquaintances, and——”

“But—Mr. Cortright knows you as Brotherton Beverley.”

“No, he doesn't. I remembered that he always got mixed about the name—used to call me Bently, or Lederly, half the time. So I worked a josh on him, Nell, and invented a pretty little romance about our being at Lake George incog. See? And reminded him that our name, up there, was Leverly. L-e-v-e-r-l-y. Get me? He swallowed it whole.”

Judith could only stare at Beverley in utter amazement. She knew that Billy Cortright had not “swallowed it whole.” She was wondering, even then, why he had chosen to appear to do so. Beverley went on again with barely a pause:

“Likewise I had to account for Vera as *Mrs.* Atkins. Well, I managed to do it satisfactorily.”

“Was I mentioned at all, Beverley?”

“Yes; in an indifferent way—as the *un*-married lady of the bunch. As my ‘really-truly’ sister, in fact.”

“By name?”

“No. But of course you will have to be introduced as my sister, Miss Atkins.”

“I won't. My name is Ralston again; under no circumstances make use of a false one. That is final, Beverley. I hate it! I loathe the whole idea of it.”

"There, there, Nell-girl. Don't fly out of the window, my dear."

"I don't see why I need be introduced at all—to either of your companions. I'm not going to stay here. I would have been gone before night if you had not——"

"What's that?" Beverley's eyes narrowed and hardened. "Yes, you are going to stay here, Elanor—right here at Dreamland, with me. And you've got to go down stairs with me, now, and be properly introduced to those two men."

"I won't—I will not be Miss Atkins. You shall not apply that name to me," Judith stormed at him with lifted head and flashing eyes and unmistakable finality. "If you use that name when you introduce me, I will deny it. I will say that my name is Ralston, then and there."

"All right, Nell-girl. Let it go at that," Beverley answered, laughing, his momentary anger at her gone. "You shall be Miss Ralston, and I'll work the half-sister stunt if any questions are asked. Come along, now, and have it over."

"Wait a moment," she called after him as he turned toward the door expecting her to follow. Her impulse was to tell him about her meeting with Cortright on the steamboat, but even as Beverley paused with one hand at the door-knob, Judith changed her mind. It was evident that Cortright had said nothing about it even after the mutual

recognitions at the roadside—neither had he objected when “Leverly” had been substituted for Beverley. He had “swallowed it whole.” And Judith knew that he had not. There was a mystery there which she could not fathom. The man himself was mysterious. His complement of coincidences was appalling.

“Well, what now?” Beverley demanded impatiently, and opened the door.

“Nothing. Never mind now. Go on down stairs. Say that I will be down presently. I will follow you in a few moments.”

“All right,” he said, and passed outside, closing the door after him.

Judith stood quite still, where she was, her mind upon the inexplicable conduct of Billy Cortright, but after a moment she heard Beverley’s step in the hall, returning, and she crossed quickly to her mirror so that her back was toward him when he reopened the door.

“I forgot,” he called to her from the threshold without entering the room, “that other chap’s name is Pendleton. Boone Pendleton. And he is rich, and handsome, and a gentleman.” The door closed again.

Judith reeled. Her heart seemed to stop beating. She caught her head between her hands. She crossed the room blindly to the bedside and threw herself upon it, face downward.

CHAPTER XIX

'TWIXT THE DEVIL AND THE SEA

JUDITH could not have defined her emotions when she threw herself face downward on the bed. There were too many of them. It was the sum of all of them that affected her; or, rather, it was the product of them—and they multiplied a thousandfold in the two or three minutes that she remained there, motionless, not even sobbing, barely breathing.

She wanted to shout with joy, and she could have screamed aloud in terror. She wanted to rush to the stairs and down them and throw herself into Boone Pendleton's arms, and cling to him, and cry out her love for him—and she would have leaped from her window and flung herself into the Potomac river rather than meet him face to face.

She was overjoyed—and consumed by fright and panic. She was thrilled with gladness—and paralyzed by horror.

Her heart was calling to Boone to come to her—and if she had heard his step in the hall she would have flown from him as silently and as swiftly as a hermit thrush.

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The indifferent pronouncement of his name by Beverley had at once glorified, and paralyzed, every active impulse that she possessed. Every intelligent thought that came to her mind conflicted with another one that followed it; but predominant over all of them was the all-consuming sense of shame because of the revelation that must come to Boone when he discovered—as he was bound sooner or later to do—the truth about her and her associates.

She started to her feet. She looked wildly around her, this way and that. She flew to the door and locked it, and as if that were not sufficient protection, she shot the extra bolt into its socket.

She ran to the open window fifteen feet above the ground and thrust her head and shoulders through it. Directly in front of her, beyond the end of Dreamland point, the Potomac glistened and gleamed in the afternoon sunlight; ten miles of water ebbed and flowed between her and the Maryland shore. Toward the right was the Machodac, three miles wide just there; to her left, the Nomini, almost as wide. Dreamland was an oblong square almost a mile in length, half a mile in width, with those broad expanses of water on three sides of it, with a tide-water pond twenty acres or more in extent at its center and within a stone's throw of the house, where Beverley's speed launch and other boats were housed and kept when they were not in

use. But they were out of commission, and, even if they had not been so, it would have been futile for Judith to attempt an escape by such means; she would have been intercepted at the water-gate into the Potomac river.

Behind her, a quarter of a mile from the landward front of the house, was the high wall of stone and cement with its broken-glass coping, surmounted in turn by wrought-iron spikes six feet tall and as sharp as needles. The wall extended from the Machodac to the Nomini and many feet into each of them. The only gate through that wall was always closed and locked; and when it was opened electric bells at a score of places in the house and outside of it gave due warning of the fact to Brotherton Beverley.

Judith knew that there were many secret hiding places, and secret methods of escape, ingeniously contrived, within and without the house, but she did not know the mysteries of them. Only Beverley knew. Even Vera had been denied that privilege.

All of this, so long in description, flitted through Judith's mind at the instant when she peered out so hopelessly from the window of her room.

But a cry of joy came to her lips, and was stilled before it found utterance. She turned back into the room and tossed or brushed to the floor the articles that cluttered the table in the middle of it; she dragged the embroidered cover from its top and

darted to the window again, waving it frantically through the opening.

An aged negro, white-haired, round-shouldered with much toil, bent and gnarled and twisted by rheumatism, had shuffled into view with a hoe and a watering-pot in his hands.

Among all the toilers at Dreamland there was not one other whom Judith would have been so overjoyed to see at that moment—save, possibly, his daughter. "Uncle" Zack and Phemie were her especial pets, and they loved her with that animal-like devotion which only the Southern-born negro can bestow.

Judith did not dare to call out to him. She hoped and prayed that he would lift his head, and see her flag of distress.

He did. He stopped in his tracks and stared. His dim old eyes widened and bulged with astonishment.

His lips moved. "Fo' de land o' massy's sake!" he gasped, and although she could not hear the words, she knew what they were. She smiled, and threw aside the table-cover, and beckoned to him, and with the forefinger of her other hand against her lips warned him to silence.

Uncle Zack put down the watering-pot and hoe and hobbled rapidly toward her. It was surprising how swiftly he could move when he wanted to.

Not until he was directly beneath her window

did Judith speak to him; but she leaned from it and cupped her hands, and spoke rapidly between them as soon as she was certain that the negro could hear her.

"Don't ask questions, Uncle Zack," she directed. "Do exactly as I tell you."

"Yassum; yassum, Mis' Nellie," the old man replied, his soul in his eyes, abject devotion in every seam and furrow of his black face.

"Bring me the short ladder from your toolhouse," she directed him, breathlessly. "Put it here against my window. I want to get out—I must get out of this room before Mr. Atkins returns. Hurry! Don't stop to ask questions. Hurry! Hurry!!"

While he was gone, Judith watched with straining eyes the point where he would reappear. When he came into view, bearing the short ladder, she flew to the closet, seized a hooded raincoat and shrouded herself within it with the hood drawn tightly over her head. She climbed through the window to the ladder and thence to the ground with the agility of a squirrel.

"Take down the ladder," she directed, breathlessly. "Put it back where it belongs. I am going to your cabin. Don't follow me, or look at me, and don't come near to your cabin—yet. As soon as you have put away the ladder, find Phemie and send her to me as soon as she can come. Tell her that her absence from the house must not be noticed, even

if she has to wait hours before she can get to me. Tell her that nobody—NOBODY, mind you—must know where I am; or that you have seen me. And, Uncle Zack, if you love me, you must not tell anybody anything.”

Judith turned and darted away before the old man could reply, but he had nodded his white head and murmured his “Yassums” continuously while she gave her orders.

He stared after her an instant when she left him; then he seized the ladder, swung it across his shoulder, and hobbled back with it to the toolhouse.

Phemie—baptized Euphemia Euphrasia—one year older than Judith, was housekeeper at Dreamland. Her face was as black as the wing of a crow; that rich and almost brilliant black which suggests transparency, and is never shiny. Her features were regular, her lips were thin and well formed; her expressive eyes and oval face were beautiful. She was an ebony-hued flower; and she was educated and refined, and used as good English as Judith, save for the slurring of the vowels after the manner of all country-born Virginians, white or black. She was very much occupied between the kitchen and dining-room, preparing the feast that Vera had ordered, when she heard her name called softly through one of the open windows.

Uncle Zack beckoned frantically when she turned toward him.

"Phemie," he whispered anxiously, when she went to him, "is yo' all alone?" His fine old face was almost tragic with the mingled emotions he felt.

"Yes, daddy," Phemie replied. "What is the matter? Are you in a misery, daddy?"

"No, no, Phemie, chile, dere ain't nothin' de matta wif me. It's Mis' Nellie. Yo' wait, now, Phemie, an' lemme git froo befo' anybody comes. Mis' Nellie done waved to me out-a de window an' orde'd me to fetch de laddah from de toolhouse. Den she done slid down it like a squir'l an' hiked fo' de cabin jes' de same 's if she was done scared out-a her five wits, sho-nuff."

"What cabin, daddy? What do you mean? What has happened?"

"I dunno. Jes' yo' wait. De missy wants you, Phemie, jes' es quick es yo' kin git dar. Only yo's got to go to her on de sly, 'thout nobody's knowin' nothin' 'bout it; an' we ain't to tell nobody nothin' 'bout it nohow. Dem's Mis' Nellie's special orde's."

He turned and hobbled away just as Vera and Beverley came into the dining-room.

"Go up and get her, then, and *make* her come down," Vera was saying, angrily. "Phemie, what are you staring at through that window? Why aren't you at work?"

"I was talking to daddy, Mrs. Atkins," Phemie

answered, returning to the table that she had been arranging. "He is in one of his miseries, and he wanted to tell me about it. Seems like he is having them mo' and mo', these days."



CHAPTER XX

THE LITTLE RED BOOK

It so happened that Pendleton was left to himself and his own devices shortly after the arrival at Dreamland. A negro had been at hand to take charge of the roadster, and to care for it. Vera excused herself and disappeared as soon as she and Beverley had conducted their guests through the wide hall that bisected the building after the manner of the regulation Virginia home.

It gave upon a broad and sheltered verandah that commanded a view of all three rivers with the Potomac directly in front, and the Maryland shore across it, ten miles away.

The verandah was furnished like a living-room, with rugs, and tables, and comfort-promoting chairs scattered about.

Beverley drew forward one of the most inviting chairs, kicked a foot-rest into position in front of it, and, with a gay smile, invited his guests to be seated, and to consider themselves perfectly at home.

"Sit here, Pendleton," he said. "You will find

this view to be about the most restful one that lies out of doors, anywhere. Find a chair that pleases you, Billy," he added, to Cortright. "Stretch yourselves, both of you. I'll send you something to wash the dust from your throats presently."

He disappeared, and at once returned with a box of cigars.

"There will be a couple of toddies in a moment," he said. "I'll be back in a jiffy, and show you to your rooms." He left them then, and, as we know, hurried to Judith.

Billy Cortright did not sit down. He leaned against one of the pillars of the verandah while he lighted a cigar.

"Fine old place, this; eh, Boone?" he remarked. "We are only about eight or ten miles above the mouth of the Potomac, where it runs into Chesapeake Bay. That is Point Lookout, yonder. Directly opposite us is the Maryland shore—St. Mary's county, I think. Up the river——"

"Say, Billy, what is the occasion? Is this a Stoddard lecture, or 'Seeing the Potomac,' from the front seat of a 'rubber' wagon?"

Billy lifted himself to the verandah-rail, dangling his feet. His genial grin and twinkling freckles glowed benignly upon his friend while he blew a cloud of smoke into the air from his cigar.

"You dear old duffer!" he said, undoubted affection in his voice. "Seems like we do run into one

another in the most out-of-the-way places, doesn't it?"

"Mighty infrequently, though," Boone commented.

"That's so, too. What is this—the second or third time since we graduated?"

"The third, Billy—since, with our respective sheepskins (precious documents) in our hands, we parted, after swearing that we would exchange letters at least once a month, and manage somehow to get together and make a week of it, at least once a year.

"That was five years ago, Bricktop. Do you realize that?"

"Sure."

"And you have never written a single letter to me; nor I to you, for that matter. We have seen one another three times in five years, and each time by accident; once, at the St. Francis, in San Francisco; once, on the Cunard Line pier in New York, three minutes before the ship sailed that took me to Europe, and now on a lonely road through the woods of Westmoreland county, Virginia, sixty miles from the nearest railway station. And we swore eternal fealty, and constantly renewed companionship."

"The fealty is all there, Boone—on both sides, I reckon. As for the companionship part of it—well—youth, particularly at the graduating cycle of

time—never comprehends the demands of maturity and necessity. Whoa, there! We're gettin' in deep, Pennie. You always were a sentimental guy. But it does seem good to call one another by the old names.

"Go on and smoke. I'm going to stroll down to the end of the point and drink in some more of that scenery."

Boone gazed smilingly at the figure of his departing friend, then he got up and walked the length of the verandah and back.

He stopped before an open window that extended to the floor of the room beyond it, hesitated a moment, and stepped through that into what he at once discovered was the library—the right sort of library, too, he decided on the instant. A glance told him that it was also the general "gathering room" of the house.

He crossed to the oblong table in the middle of the floor and stood there idly turning the leaves of a magazine, although his eyes were not upon it. They were roving about the big room from the pictures against the walls to the low and convenient book-shelves that lined it, beneath them.

There were indications of comfort, and ease, and educated refinement, everywhere; evidences of good taste on every hand. Dreamland was the home of gentle breeding; he did not doubt that.

He returned to the window, presently, with the

magazine he had been so idly fingering in his hand, and he stood there just inside of it for a time, looking out.

Billy Cortright was strolling aimlessly along the bank above the shore an eighth of a mile away.

Boone's attention was arrested just then by something moving, nearer to him.

The figure of a woman darted into his line of vision and moved swiftly across a space that was directly in front of him. She wore a raincoat that entirely enveloped her, and the hood of it was drawn closely over her head. She disappeared while Boone might have counted "one, two, three"; but he found that he was gazing intently at the low bower of climbing roses that had so quickly shut off his view of her.

He smiled broadly when she had gone, and turned about, for he heard Beverley's voice from inside of the house and knew that his host was returning. "It's odd," he was thinking, "that I should be pursued by fancies, even here; but there was a suggestion of familiarity in the motions of that young woman. I wonder?—of course! It was Mrs. Atkins—not as yet sufficiently dolled up to pass inspection, and concealing the fact under a raincoat. That accounts for it."

"Want to go to your room, Pendleton?" Beverley asked, coming out to him.

"Yes; thank you."

"Come along. Where is Cortright?"

"Out yonder. See him? He went after a drink—of the scenery."

"Hello!" Beverley exclaimed, spying one of the tables. "Neither of you have drunk your toddy. Here's how. I'll drink Billy's and send him another one when he gets back."

"I stepped into the library through the open window," Boone said. "The servant must have brought them while I was gone."

He still carried the magazine in his hand when he followed Beverley into the house and up the stairs, being presently shown into a large and sumptuously appointed room that commanded the same view as the verandah below it.

"There is your suitcase beside the rocker," Beverley announced. "The house is at your disposal, as they say in Spanish. Cortright's room is next to this one, through the bathroom. Come down to the verandah when you are ready. Dinner will be served in a half hour or so. If you want anything in the meantime, punch that button."

Not until Beverley had gone did Boone realize that he had brought the magazine to his room—that he had inadvertently clung to it since the moment he had so idly turned its leaves where it had rested on the library table. He tossed it aside and began his preparations for dinner.

Cortright came in while he was shaving.

"Atkins told me how to find you," he announced. "Said that my room was next to yours. Oh, I see. Through here, eh? Tell you what, Pennie, old boy, this is some place, this Dreamland. Seems like I ought to pull down a pretty good bunch of yellow-backs off of this friend of yours. And that reminds me——"

"Billy, what the devil is your business, or profession, anyway?" Boone interrupted, but working diligently with his razor. "When you graduated you were going in for electrical engineering, if I remember correctly."

"Sure, I did. Then I took up landscaping—and civil engineering—and several other things too numerous to mention. I am almost anything, Boone, that's got a dollar concealed in it." He crossed the bathroom into his own quarters, but stopped in the doorway.

"It looks to me as if this place was pretty nearly finished, Billy," Boone remarked between razor strokes. "I'm afraid that you won't get much out of Atkins; there doesn't seem to be much left to do."

"Nope. That's right. But I'm well repaid for the trip by finding you here. How much of a friend of yours is Atkins, anyhow, Boone? How long have you known him—and that charming wife of his?"

"Since the forenoon of the day before yesterday, Billy."

"Eh? What's that? What are you giving me?"

"Fact," Boone replied; and he told the whole story while Cortright began his own preparations for dinner, and made free, as he knew he was welcome to do, with his friend's shirts, and ties, and whatever he happened to require. He made frequent comments, and laughed, and guded, and asked intimate and pointed questions from time to time as the tale progressed.

"I sure thought that you were long-lost friends, reunited after many tribulations," Billy said at the end of it, "and I find that you don't know the Atkinses half as well as I do. And, let me warn you, Pennie; there is one of the bunch that you don't know—yet. But she's here—so they tell me. Atkins' sister; or his half-sister."

"What is the warning, Billy?"

"Beware, old chap, of the charming and wholly irresistible Mrs. Atkins. She likes men in precisely the same way that an entomologist likes moths and butterflies—for the sake of making a collection, and studying the specimens afterward. She impales them with pins, and sticks them up inside of her memory for future reference."

"Oh, I'm immune, old man," Pendleton replied, laughing at the simile.

"Are you?" Cortright put on his coat. "Gee, but you're slow, Boone. All the same, look out for little Vera when the sister appears on the scene. They

hate each other like poison, and the angel-faced Vera is as jealous as a pet spaniel. Come along down when you get ready. I'm going now." He crossed Boone's room again, and paused half way to the door. "If I wasn't in love with Humanity, and if I followed a profession that would let me stay twenty-four hours in one place, Pennie, Mr. Anthony Atkins' sister could have *my* trunk, and the key to it, too," he added, and went out of the room.

Boone, being dressed and prepared to follow him, ten minutes later, picked up the magazine with the intention of putting it back where he had found it.

It fell open in his hands, and between the pages that dropped apart, a thin and slender memorandum-book was exposed, with a tiny, tinted pencil thrust into the back of the red Russia-leather binding. Across the front of it, in lettering that he had done himself while Judith had peered smilingly over his shoulder, was her name, JUDITH RALSTON; and beneath the name, in his own handwriting, the magic words, "My sweetheart."

He seized it, exclaiming sharply as he did so. The magazine dropped to the floor at his feet while he stood staring. Never in his life had he been so amazed as then.

The little book belonged to Judith. She had used it at the bungalow to keep a record of the many games they played together during their compulsory isolation. Boone recognized it the instant he saw it.

He did not descend the stairs until he was called, nearly half an hour later; and, when he did go down, the little book was safely stowed away in one of his pockets, and the magazine that had contained it was locked up inside of his suit case.

CHAPTER XXI

THE WARNING AT THE GATE

DINNER had been announced, and they were awaiting Boone on the river-front verandah.

He hesitated as he neared it, bracing himself for the trying moment which he felt sure must follow, the instant he joined them.

There was no doubt in his mind that Judith would be there, with the others, for how could she, logically, avoid the meeting? Why should she wish to do so?

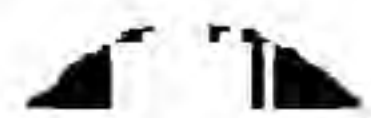
After the bewildering discovery of her memorandum-book he had passed the time until he was summoned to dinner in endeavoring to comprehend the remarkable circumstance, and his mind had grasped at once the one and only plausible solution of the problem.

Atkins was, of course, the Bud Beverley of Horace Fayban's strange tale. Vera was the "other woman" of that same story. They had been the prisoners in the jail at Jasper Center whom Fayban had talked about; and Atkins, or Beverley, or whatever his name might be, was the man to whom Fay-

ban had offered so insinuatingly to introduce him, as being the husband of Judith. Boone merely shrugged his shoulders with annoyance when he recalled that part of the affair. Not for an instant did he consider it as worth a second thought.

These two, the Beverleys, his hosts at Dreamland, had escaped from the Jasper Center jail that same night. So much was evident. And he had come upon them the following day at the moment of their extremity—and had played into their hands and assisted them and aided them in every possible manner ever since.

How deftly and with what masterly skill this man and this woman had played him as a sacrificial pawn in their chess-game with living pieces! Boone understood many of the little circumstances that had occurred since his meeting with them, while he stood at the window of his room looking out upon the broad expanse of the Potomac; small happenings along the road, that had only indifferently puzzled him at the moment, were made indubitably plain. He bestowed a fleeting smile upon the scenery when he recalled the puzzling likeness to some unremembered person that he had discovered in the personality, rather than in the features, of "Mr. Anthony Atkins." It was accounted for. They were Judith's mannerisms, Judith's whimsical utterances, Judith's quaint enunciation of certain words and phrases—and a faint something in the expres-



sion of Judith's eyes at infrequent intervals—that he had seen and heard so elusively reproduced in the man whose escape from the custody of Horace Fayban he had so unwittingly engineered.

Ah, well, he could forgive the man and the woman for making use of him, since they had, in doing it, brought him to Judith.

Did Judith know already that he was there, at Dreamland? . . . He wondered. . . . Had Atkins, when he went to her and told her about his two guests, mentioned their names? Was Judith prepared for the event of their meeting again? Or was she still in ignorance of his presence at Dreamland? In any case, would she wish to recognize him—in their presence?

“Probably not,” he told himself, silently; “and if not—I must try to find a way for her to discover me before we meet face to face in the dining-room, or on the verandah. Otherwise, the shock of such a meeting might be too great for her to hide the effect of it.”

He went into the upper hall and searched it for a door that might possibly give admittance to Judith's room. He had half a notion that he would know that she was behind it, if his eyes happened to light upon it. He went so far as to tap lightly against two of them that he thought likely ones—with the feeling that a sixth sense, of propinquity, would come to his aid and help him.

When he returned to his own room he left the door of it ajar, and drew forward a chair from which he could command a view of the length of the upper hall and the stairway, and he sat there until the summons came for him to descend.

So he hesitated when he drew near to the verandah where the others were awaiting him. He came to a full stop—and recalled the library with its open French windows where he had found the magazine and the memorandum-book that Judith had forgotten.

The door to it stood open. He passed inside. From a convenient shelter within the room he peered out upon the group outside.

Judith was not there—and he could delay no longer.

He returned to the wide hall, and joined the others on the verandah.

“Pardon me for keeping you waiting,” he said, speaking generally.

“No hurry, Pendleton. There is one shy yet. Nothing is ever done in a hurry. You’ll find that out if you ever get a wife—or a sister.”

“Do go after Nell, Tony,” Vera said, impatiently, although she was smiling archly upon Pendleton at the moment.

“My dear Vera, if you were keeping us waiting, and if I were to ‘go after’ you, what would you say

to me? You would tell me—very sweetly, of course—to mind my own business, and that you would be down when you got quite ready.”

“And, my dear Tony, you would reply just like this: ‘All right. The dinner is getting cold and I’m going to eat it. You will find me in the dining-room when you do come.’ ” It was cleverly done, and everybody laughed. Then she added: “All of which sums up the present case. Nell will find us in the dining-room when she does come down, for we are going in, right now. Your arm, Mr. Pendleton? Thank you.”

“Your arm, Billy? Thank you,” Beverley imitated her; and, laughing merrily, they all marched in to dinner.

Boone scarcely knew what was said to him after they were seated, although his replies were faultless. His back was toward the entrance door. He dreaded the moment when Judith would come rapidly into the room and discover him. And then it occurred to him that her continued absence might be the consequence of her having been told that “a Mr. Pendleton” was one of the two unexpected guests. And he asked himself if she were holding aloof because he *was* there . . . if she were purposely avoiding him . . . if her reason for avoidance of him was fear lest *he* might betray the circumstance of their previous acquaintance in the surprise of unexpectedly beholding her . . . or, if there was

no reason for her staying away from the dinner table, save that she did not wish to see him.

After a time, becoming satisfied in his own mind that Judith did not mean to join them, Boone began to regard more closely the attitudes of his three companions.

Vera, he decided, was unaffectedly indifferent; was possibly rather pleased than otherwise because Judith did not appear. Cortright, who sat facing the entrance door, looked toward it every time he lifted his eyes from his plate, and Boone remembered that Billy had met and known Judith the preceding summer; therefore Boone was not surprised at his evident desire to see her again.

Atkins ("or Beverley—what the devil is his name, anyhow?" Boone thought, silently) was manifestly disturbed by the non-appearance of his sister Nell. ("Nell," Pendleton decided, "must be his nickname for her; a contraction of Elanor.")

"Tell Phemie I want her," Beverley told his black butler when the fish-course was being cleared away.

"Phemie done 'scused herse'f to me, sah, a minute ago, while she run to de cabin to look afte' her ole daddy—yassir," the butler replied. "But she'll be back agin right soon, sah."

Beverley shoved his chair away from the table and got upon his feet, murmuring an excuse as he did so. He left the room hastily, and Boone knew

that he had gone to bring Judith to the dinner table. There was an expression in Beverley's eyes and a compression about his lips when he went out that Boone had not discovered in him until that moment—hard, and cold, and compelling, and with unmistakable anger depicted by his slightly distended nostrils.

"My husband is devoted to his sister Nell," Vera announced after the door had closed behind him. She laughed, but the sneer in her voice was not hidden from the two men. "Nothing is quite complete for him, without her." And instantly Pendleton's opinion of his host went up a degree in response to that statement.

"I'll have to tell you a joke, Boone," Cortright remarked with a somewhat too apparent desire to change the subject. "It's on me. You know how I get mixed about names—always did; ever since I can remember. Well, last summer, up at Lake George, I misunderstood prefixes as well as names. Got the idea that the Mrs. was Miss, and that the Miss was Mrs., and as a consequence—but I forgot. You heard all about that out there in the road where you picked me up. But I sure did——"

He stopped. Vera half started to her feet. Boone Pendleton did so, quite, and was half way to the door before he remembered himself and stopped. A crashing noise had resounded through the house; but while the three persons in the dining-

room waited and listened, absolute silence followed it.

"Sit down, Mr. Pendleton," Vera said, and laughed aloud as if she were greatly amused. "It's Tony. That's his way—at times. The explanation is very simple. Nell probably did not wish to come down to dinner, and locked herself in her room. Tony smashed the lock when she declined to open the door. They will both be here, presently. And please don't take it to heart that my sister-in-law seems to prefer not to make your acquaintance; she will change her mind when she does know you. She is just a little bit queer, you know, about meeting strangers."

"It's on me if it's on anybody," Cortright remarked. "The lady knows me; she does not know you, Pennie. I'm the chap that she is dodging."

Beverley came into the room.

He was as smiling and as debonair as Boone had ever seen him. "Nell won't be down to dinner," he said, as he resumed his chair at the table, "but she will make an effort to join us later, on the verandah. She has a bad headache."

"Was she groaning with the pain of it, Tony, dear? Was that the noise we all heard?" Vera inquired.

"No," Beverley chuckled as if he were amused. "She couldn't open her door. The lock had got caught, somehow. I had to smash it for her."

Boone knew that the man lied—only he would not have known it if he had not found that memorandum book. Vera knew that he lied, but she attributed it to the fact that Beverley quite frequently came off second best in his differences with his sister.

Billy Cortright also knew that Beverley had lied, and he alone surmised the true reason for the evasion; he guessed on the instant that Miss Ralston had hidden herself away so that Beverley could not find her—but that he meant to find her, and to compel her presence with the company, later; unless, he, Billy, should happen to find her first, which he decided then and there to try to do.

He shot a glance at Boone and their eyes met; and in that instant Boone grasped the situation—partly.

He could not have explained why he did so unless it was because he suddenly recalled the hurrying figure in the raincoat that had flitted out of sight behind the rosebower while he stood at the library window.

Again he had seen Judith without recognizing her.

Again he knew, too late, that an opportunity had evaded him. Why had he not leaped the verandah-rail and pursued her? But she could not get very far away. He remembered the high wall, and the wrought-iron gate. He, too, would search for

her as soon as he could find an excuse to get away from the others.

The dinner proceeded. Coffee had just been served when an electric buzzer that was hidden away somewhere within the room rattled its warning note and Beverley sprang to his feet. Vera, too, started violently.

"What was that?" Boone Pendleton demanded, sharply.

"The gate," Beverley replied, and left them abruptly.



CHAPTER XXII

A TENSE MOMENT

"You may serve coffee to us on the verandah," Vera said to the black butler, rising from her chair. "And some green chartreuse, also, Rastus."

The two men followed her from the room. At the door which gave upon the verandah Vera stepped aside for them to pass her. "I will be with you in one moment," she announced, and left them to their own devices.

"Queer doings here, Billy," Boone said as he selected a chair.

"Think so?" Billy responded, helping himself to a cigar from the box on one of the tables and perching his compact physique on the rail, where he kicked his heels lightly against the spindles beneath it. "You don't happen to know Miss Ralston. I do."

"Miss Ralston?" Boone asked quickly, surprised to hear his friend make use of that name.

"Uh-huh."

"Why, I thought——" Boone began, and changed his mind. Billy was his best friend; had been his

chum and roommate throughout four intimate years. "No, I didn't either. I knew." It was Billy's turn to be surprised although he gave no outward evidence of it. Boone went on: "Where the dickens did you get that name?"

"She told me."

"When you were at Lake George, last summer?"

"No. Day before yesterday—on the boat."

"What the——"

"We came down the river, to Nomini, on the same steamboat—that is, she left it at Nomini. I did not. I saw her go aboard, at Washington—and remembered her; only, I supposed her to be Mrs. Beverley."

"*Leverly*, Billy."

"No—Beverley. I'm not quite the consummate ass that Beverley takes me for."

"Billy! Tell me, please! What are you, anyway? On the level."

"Thank God I am not quite as stupid as you are, Pennie. Don't you know—haven't you guessed—what my business is?"

"No; only what you have told me."

"Rats, Boone; and then some. I'm a shining light in the same profession that your dear friend Mr. Horace Fayban follows."

"A secret ser——" Boone stopped in the middle of a word, too greatly astonished for further utterance.

"Uh-huh. Just that, Pennie."

"Good God!"

"Feazes you, does it, old chap?"

"Great heaven, Billy! Then you are here after—after—them; all of them!"

"Surest thing you know, Pennie."

"But—how—when—where——"

"Hold on a minute or you'll lose your breath. You're getting mixed. I'll put my cards on the table face up for your inspection, if that fascinating siren of Beverley's will stay away long enough. Doubtless she will, for I fancy that both of them are somewhat occupied just about now, in a discussion of ways and means to meet and overcome a new complication that has confronted them. That alarm at the gate *might* have been made by Miss Ralston, in trying to give us the slip—only, she won't get very far, if it was."

"Look here, Cortright, I——"

"Wait, Boone. Don't go off half cocked; you can't smash the cap properly, when you do that. I haven't finished yet."

"Go on, then. When you do get through I will have something to say."

"All right, old chap. You'll get the chance. I was about to add that I do not think that it was Miss Ralston who started that buzzer. I'd be willing to bet a Russian kopec and a couple of French centimes that she is safely tucked away in one of

the cabins on the place, and that that black beauty—Phemie, Beverley called her—did the tucking, or had a hand in it. I think that Phemie went to her when ‘she done ’scused herse’f while she run to de cabin to look afte’ her ole daddy.’ You see, Boone, I rather suspected that the lady might attempt something of the sort as soon as she found out that you and I were both here. That was why I was so interested in the scenery, from the shore. I wanted to keep an eye on the house. See these?” He took a small but powerful pair of binoculars from one of his pockets, and dropped them back into it again. “Miss Ralston, shrouded in a rain-coat with the hood of it drawn over her head, climbed out of her window to a ladder that one of the niggers put there for her—and beat it. That nigger was probably Phemie’s ‘ole daddy.’ ”

“I feel like punching your head for you, Billy.”

“It wouldn’t be the first time.”

“Who did start that buzzer, if Ju—— if Miss Ralston did not?”

Cortright grinned when Pendleton caught himself half way in the enunciation of Judith’s name.

“Judith is a beautiful name, isn’t it?” he drawled. “The person at the gate who rang that buzzer—wittingly, or not—was probably Fayban. Sit down, Boone. Don’t get rambunctious. We must seem to be slightly bored by one another’s company when the siren returns.”

"But—Fayban, of all men!"

"Sure, Mike! Fayban, of all men. Fayban, my dear Boone, possesses many of the trying qualities of a long-eared brayer, but also he has some excellent ones."

"So you know——"

"I know everything. I wouldn't be an operative serving under the best and wisest chief that ever happened if I did not. I have been on Bud Beverley's trail ever since he began to go wrong. On, and off, and on again. That is our way. Fayban exceeded his authority when he arrested Bud and Vera, and tried to get Miss Ralston, too, down at Jasper Center. He thought he could bluff it through, and that Bud would weaken. But, you see, he hasn't been very long in the business—and he didn't know Bud Beverley. You couldn't bluff that guy if you had him down and tied and held an automatic at his head and threatened to shoot. He'd only laugh at you. Fayban found that out, too late. And when he got back to Jasper after his last call at your place——"

"He followed me back there, did he? But, how do you happen to know all about it?"

"Shut up. Let me talk. We won't have much more time. After that he sent the chief a one hundred and fifty-word cipher message. The next morning, when he discovered that Bud and Vera had sawed their way out of limbo, he used the long-

distance phone. Within two hours after that every branch office of our department east of the Mississippi had the same information; and therefore every individual operative. See, Boone? Understand? Get me?" Billy bent forward and added, impressively: "There isn't a place on the top of God's green earth, Pennie, where you can hide from Uncle Sam, and stay hidden, if Uncle Sam happens to want you. Don't forget that. I know all about your seven or eight days at the bungalow with Miss Judith—Elanor, as we name her. That is, I know all that Fayban thinks *he* knows about it; and all, likewise, that Fayban imagined—which did not, and does not, impress me, or the chief either, for that matter; so you can chase that sparkle out of your eyes forthwith, Mr. Pendleton. After we got the messages from Fayban, two or three of us hiked for the Union Station in Washington, having a hunch that Miss Judith would show up there, sooner or later—which she did. I saw her get off of the train. She went to the express office and gave up her trunk check, and expressed her belongings to an address in New York City, which I have. From there she went to Woodward's store, then to a steamboat ticket office in the National Hotel, where she bought a ticket for Nomini. I didn't care where she went after that, so I left her to herself for the balance of the day; but I also bought a ticket for Nomini. On the boat I made myself known to her

as her hotel acquaintance of last summer at Lake George, and I purposely remained on board when she got off. I went around the point to the landing in the Machodac river, hiked for the spot where you found me, and waited there for Bud and Vera to show up; and I'd have been waiting there yet if they hadn't materialized. But I did not expect to see *you*; and, first off, I couldn't exactly size up the situation. You made it all quite plain, however, when I asked you how long you had known Mr. Atkins."

Pendleton bent forward in his chair.

"Billy," he said, "I want to tell you something."

"Go ahead."

"I love Judith Ralston."

"I know it, Boone." It was a simple statement, but it meant a lot, and somehow Boone knew that it did. He breathed easier. A shade of the tenseness had disappeared from his voice and manner when he went on.

"And Judith loves me. We have confessed our love. I asked her to marry me at once, because——"

"Because of that week at the bungalow. I know. That is like you, Boone. What did she say to that?"

"She told me that she did not care a snap of her finger what people might think or say. She told me that I would have to wait a year—or

at least until I had found out all of the truth about her, from others; and that, if then—if then I believed in her, had faith in her, trusted her, and loved her just the same, she would be my wife. And, Billy, if she were really mixed up in this damnable business she would not have taken that attitude—would she?”

“I don’t know, old chap.”

“What? Do you mean to say——”

“Wait a minute, Boone. She *is* mixed up in it, and she will have to take her medicine when it is doled out to her. Hold on, now. Don’t fly to pieces. Wait. I think almost as well of Elanor Judith Ralston as you do. I’d marry her myself, and take chances on her entire innocence, if she loved me, and would have me. Personally, I think that Brotherton Beverley Ralston—that’s his full name, and he is her full brother, too—has permitted her to drift into this thing, and pulled the wool over her eyes, believing that he could get away with it. I do not believe that she has suspected what he was up to, until quite recently. But—now hold yourself in hand, old chap—*she has had guilty knowledge of what has been going on, for the last six months. That much I know. And, my dear fellow, she will have to pay the price. Uncle Sam never lets go.*”

Pendleton leaped from his chair and kicked it out of the way.

"Billy! Do you mean to tell me——" he began.

"Wait, Pennie, old man. Wait a moment."

"Well?"

"I am your friend. I am Judith Ralston's friend, also, because you love her, and she loves you. I'll play that game to the limit. But—she is in bad—on the surface of things. If Uncle Sam orders her arrest, I'll have to——"

"By God, you shall not!"

"We will let that pass, Boone, for the present. I want to ask you a question. This: What will the colonel, your father, say about such a marriage for you?"

"I don't care one damn what he says—or thinks!"

"And your mother?"

"Mother will be on my side—when she knows Judith."

"I doubt it, Pennie. Even the best of mothers do not, as a rule—Look out! Here they come; and holy mackerel! they are bringing Fayban along. They have let him inside. Now, what do you know about that! Brace yourself, Boone, I'll start a subject, and you take your cue from me. There will be hell to pay when Hoddie Fayban finds you here, and you can bet your sweet life that Beverley's got something up his sleeve or he'd never have let him inside of the wall at Dreamland."

CHAPTER XXIII

THE PAINTED CABIN

BOONE PENDLETON did a strange thing when Billy Cortright uttered his hurried warning of the approach of Fayban.

Billy was still perched on the rail of the verandah; his position was such that he could see through the length of the wide hall that bisected the house, and thus it was that he discovered Beverley and Vera, and Fayban with them, before they ascended the few steps to the porch at the opposite entrance.

Pendleton had started from his chair but a moment before, and was on his feet. He wheeled about at Cortright's warning and shot one swift glance toward the approaching trio. In that instant the thought flashed into his mind that he would get away for the time being; that he would not stay where he was until the coming of Fayban; that there doubtless would be "hell to pay," as Billy had so graphically expressed it, when Fayban discovered him—even if Fayban was not already informed of his presence at Dreamland.

Back of it all, behind every impulse that actuated

him, was the impelling conviction that he must lose not one moment in seeking Judith if he was to find her at all—that the situation was a case of “now, or never,”—and that no matter what else Fayban might attempt to do the moment he arrived, he most certainly would interfere with Boone’s immediate prosecution of the search.

Billy Cortright had not ceased speaking when Boone rested one hand upon the verandah rail and vaulted it, and in another instant he had darted away, keeping close to the building, and disappeared.

Cortright gazed after him in amazement. Then he chuckled.

From his own position on the rail which commanded the view through the wide hallway, he was convinced that not one of the three persons had glimpsed his friend in converse with him; so, with his characteristic grin still partly in evidence, with his cigar pointing heavenward from one corner of his mouth, and with his interlocked hands supporting one lifted knee while the other leg dangled and kept time to a tune he began to hum, he waited.

His keen mind had already grasped one detail in regard to the admission of Fayban to Dreamland that had escaped Pendleton; it was that in all probability Beverley had *not* told Fayban of Boone’s presence, or of his own. Such a course would be characteristic of Beverley’s delicate and diplomatic

methods of finding out if his two guests, who were already there, and the newcomer knew each other. And it was as certain as fate in Billy Cortright's judgment that Bud Beverley had some good and sufficient reason of his own for admitting Fayban to Dreamland, else he would never have let him come inside of the wall. Billy was heartily glad that Boone had "ducked." As for himself, and Fayban's discovery of him—Fayban already knew that Cortright was at Dreamland, or somewhere near it, for the very good reason that he had been so instructed by the chief. And two operatives never recognize one another on occasions like that one.

"Mr. Cortright—Mr. Fayban," Beverley introduced the two men a moment later, and glanced curiously around, seeking Pendleton.

Billy, shaking Fayban by the hand as if they had never met until that moment, said:

"Looking for our friend, Tony? I don't know where he is. He hiked off somewhere a few minutes ago; be back presently, I suppose. Is this your first visit to this part of Virginia, Mr. Fayban? It's mine. Bully, isn't it? Did you ever discover anything more restful than this view across the three rivers?"

"I think I'll look for our other guest," Beverley remarked while Fayban was making some commonplace and trite reply to Cortright. He was secretly

glad that Billy had not mentioned Pendleton's name, and Billy knew he was. The fact merely confirmed him in his previously formed opinion.

He resumed his perch on the rail and chatted a moment or two with Vera and Fayban. Then he got upon his feet, stretched deliciously, selected a fresh cigar, and remarked:

"You are old friends, I take it, so I won't spoil your reminiscences. I think I will go for a stroll."

Billy walked leisurely down the steps, paused there to light his fresh cigar, stood still a moment after it, as if selecting a direction to follow, and then wandered slowly away. But there was a design in his method, for he went precisely the same way that Pendleton had gone.

Meanwhile, Boone had carried out a very definite idea of his own.

When he vaulted the rail and started so swiftly away, he knew that there would be at least two or three minutes to spare before either Beverley or Vera would be enabled to come away from the verandah to seek him; and that they would seek him—or that one of them would do so—he did not doubt.

Billy Cortright's remark to him about the negro with the ladder, and the cabin, and Phemie, was in his mind. He decided to use those two or three minutes of grace in seeking Phemie. She had been in the dining-room when they had gone in to dinner,

and had immediately disappeared, but he had been impressed by her ebony-hued beauty, and he would know her by sight.

Boone's course took him around the house past the windows of the dining-room, which fronted toward the Potomac. He discovered Phemie inside, and alone, and he called softly to her through the same open window that her daddy had used in summoning her to Judith.

"Yes, sir," she replied, going quickly to the window.

"Phemie, tell me how to find your father's cabin. I must go there, at once," he said, with an imperative ring in his voice. He had been familiar with the negro character all his life and knew exactly what attitude to assume. He knew the negroes' sterling loyalty to those they love, and he realized, even before he spoke to Phemie, that she would face and suffer death by slow torture rather than betray Judith Ralston to her enemies.

Phemie did not reply.

Boone could see the sullenly obstinate expression in her eyes; that same expression that one sometimes finds in a spaniel that refuses to obey. It is peculiarly the possession of a loyal negro "who won't tell." He smiled at her, reassuringly.

"Listen to me, Phemie," he said, rapidly. "I want you to believe me, too. Look straight at me while I tell you what I have to say."

"Yes, sir," she replied; but there was no lessening of the obstinacy in her eyes.

"I love Miss Nellie"—he purposely made use of that name knowing that it was the one employed at Dreamland—"and Miss Nellie loves me. She has promised to marry me. She did not run away from me when she climbed down the ladder that your father found for her; she ran from the others. She ran away from all of us, really, because they did not know, and do not know, that Miss Nellie and I are even acquainted. Will you tell me, please, how to find the cabin? I know that she is there."

Phemie's big, somber eyes, lacking nothing of their obstinacy, stared into Boone's as if they would read his soul, and he waited with what patience he could command, for his statement to sink into her comprehension.

He did not know that Judith, in a passion of angry tears when Phemie had gone to her while the others were dining, had thrown her arms around the black girl's neck, and poured out to her with incoherent eagerness the greater part of her story from the time when her saddle horse had picked up the stone, to the moment of Boone Pendleton's unexpected arrival at Dreamland. She had said nothing about Fayban, and the real reason for her hasty flight homeward; but she had told Boone's name; and Phemie, with her big black eyes on the man outside of the window, knew that he was the

same one who had carried her beloved mistress in his arms more than a mile through the rain and mud to his bungalow, who had nursed her and cared for her, who had served her as considerately as Miss Nellie, the best and sweetest lady that ever lived, should be served—and Phemie's own eyes told her as unerringly as Truth itself that the man who faced her through the open window was a "real Virginia gentleman."

Her face softened. Her lips parted. She was on the point of answering him when she was startled by the sound of a quick and familiar step beyond the dining-room door, approaching it.

"Quick!" she warned Boone, sharply. "That way!" She pointed with one lifted arm. "It's the only cabin that's painted. Mr. Atkins is coming. Hide!"

She held a red spread in one hand that she had removed from one of the side tables, and when Boone, in obedience to her warning, ducked his head and dodged beneath a trellis of climbing honeysuckle, she flung one end of it through the open window and began vigorously to shake it.

Beverley came swiftly into the dining-room. Boone kept his position under the trellis for the very good reason that there was absolutely nothing else for him to do if he wished to remain undiscovered.

"Phemie," Beverley said, sharply, as soon as he

had closed the door behind him, "Miss Nellie has gone to Uncle Zack's cabin, and she is there now if you haven't hidden her away, since then, in some other place. Oh, I know. You and your daddy would be the first ones she'd fly to; and you would know that I'd be wise to that fact, and you would hide her in some other place of your own selection, where you'd think I could not find her."

Phemie looked at him doggedly. She made no reply.

"Never mind, Phemie," he went on, with a light laugh. "It's all right. I am glad that Miss Nellie is out of the house—especially glad, just now. You need not answer me. I know that you wouldn't, even if I threatened to brand you with a red-hot iron. I want you to take a message to her."

Not by a word or a sign did Phemie answer him. He went on:

"Tell her to stay where she is, until I send for her. Tell her that Fayban is here. Mr. Fayban. Can you remember that name? She will understand. Tell her that he does not know that she is here, and that I don't want him to know it. Now, go. But wait. Have you happened to see Mr. Pendleton in the last ten or fifteen minutes?"

"No, sir." Phemie was ready enough with her answer, then.

"He is probably in his room. I'll go there." At the doorway he added: "If you should see

him, tell him that we are awaiting him on the verandah. You need not mention Mr. Fayban's name to him."

Beverley went from the room. Phemie leaned from the open window.

"Mr. Pendleton," she called, softly.

"Yes?" Boone answered, emerging from beneath the trellis.

"Go to the cabin—the painted one—and wait fo' me. Keep out of sight if yo' can, sir. I'll be along in jes' a minute. Mis' Nellie ain't there, sir, but I'll take yo' to her, right sma't. She said that she didn't want to see yo', nohow, but I reckon she'll be mighty glad when she does."

"God bless you, Phemie," Boone exclaimed, fervently, and was gone.

He knew only the general direction to take to find the cabin, and he broke into a run as soon as he dared, darting behind bushes and trees whenever either offered protection, and he came upon it suddenly, snugly hidden away beyond a thick growth of rhododendrons.

He sprang toward the door and threw it open—and stopped. Then he leaped madly forward, more frightened than he had ever been in all his life.

Judith was there.

She was lying face downward in the middle of the earthen floor with her head pillowed upon her arms sobbing, and in such an utter abandon of

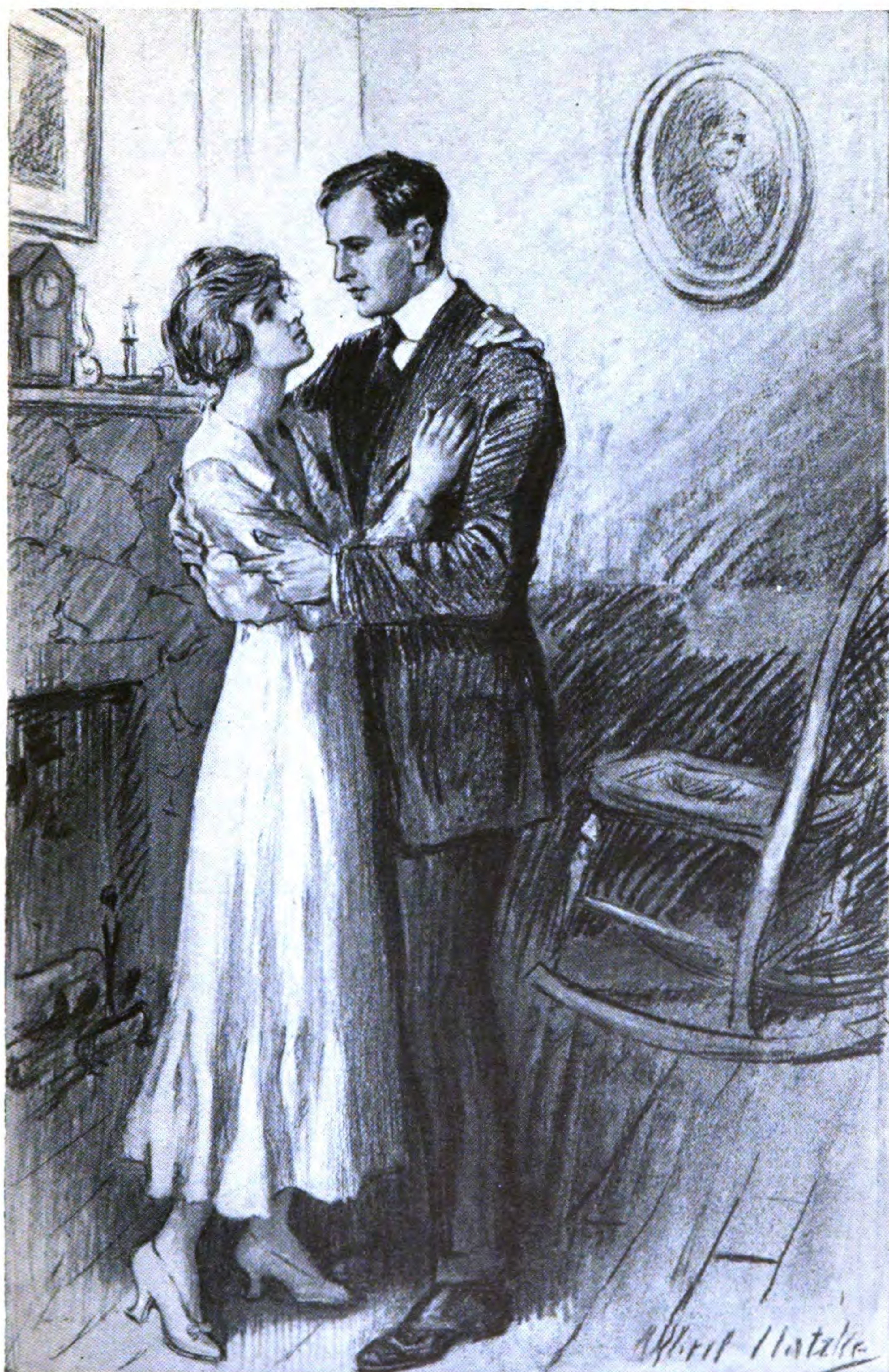
grief that she did not hear the door open, nor know that Boone was there until he took her in his arms and lifted her, and held her sorrow-racked, unresponsive body close against his own.

"My darling! Oh, my little girl! What is it? Tell me!" he said to her brokenly.

"You have come to me, Boone," she gasped, between her sobs. "Thank God! Oh, Boone!"

For a time they remained as they were, locked in each other's arms, both silent. Then a heavy tread sounded on the packed earth of the pathway beyond the rhododendrons. Somebody was seeking them; but who? Not Phemie. It was the heavy tread of a man that startled him so.

Had Beverley seen him, and followed?



“My darling! Oh, my little girl! What is it?
Tell me,” he said to her brokenly

CHAPTER XXIV

THE SECRET PLACES

THE sound of the footfalls alarmed Judith as greatly as they did Boone.

She, also, sprang to her feet. Every manifestation of her recent grief had disappeared, but the still more recent joy that had come to her was glowing in her eyes as she darted swiftly past her lover toward the door that had remained half opened since Boone passed it.

Judith closed it silently. She seized a bar of white ash that stood on end beside it within reach of her hand, and dropped it into place behind the iron brackets at either side of the doorway. She made no sound.

She turned, then, to face Boone, putting her fingers to her lips to enjoin silence, and the next instant she glided swiftly past him to a hand-made, bench-like cot that stood on the floor beneath one of the cabin's two windows.

"Quick, Boone," she said to him in a whisper, as she pulled the cot aside, lifting it easily at the end that was farthest from the cabin door.

Boone watched her, curiously, but as she bent forward after moving the cot, a sharp summons sounded against the deal door, and his attention was diverted for the instant. When he looked toward her again—he had turned his head away only a fraction of a second—Judith was beckoning imperiously to him from behind the bench-like cot, and only her head and shoulders were visible above it. Again the fingers of one hand were against her lips, enjoining silence.

He sprang to her side.

A trap door had dropped through the earthen floor under her weight, and Boone was so utterly amazed that he halted at sight of it.

“Quick, Boone,” Judith whispered so low that the words barely got to him, and reached up a hand toward him.

Wonderingly he took hold of it. More amazedly still he obeyed the pulling force that he felt in the grasp of it, and jumped down into the open space beside her, although he doubted if there was room for both of them to stand side by side in that narrow opening.

The trap dropped instantly under his added weight—and stopped with a somewhat confounding jar, almost at once.

“This way,” Judith whispered into his ear, and pulled him aside. “Keep close to me,” she added, and drew his head toward her until their cheeks

touched. Even then the trap, as it rose silently to its former position in the floor over their heads, brushed against him. He was still too much astonished to comprehend all that was taking place, but he did understand, then, what Phemie had meant when she had promised to take him to Judith, from the painted cabin.

"Lift me," he heard Judith whispering into his ear. "I must fasten it. It is too high for me to reach without standing on something, and there isn't time——"

He lifted her in his arms before she had finished what she was saying. He heard a slight scraping noise above him, followed by another whispered command to put her down.

They were in utter darkness, but Judith grasped him by one hand and led him away through stygian blackness.

"Won't that trap door be found?" he ventured.

"Shhhh!" she warned him, and he was silent.

They had gone onward a hundred feet or so, Boone surmised, before Judith spoke to him in her natural tones.

"Are you frightened, Boone, dear?" she asked him.

"Frightened? No. But I am wondering what has happened. Have we gone suddenly back to the days of the Arabian nights, and to the practice of

magic, sweetheart? Or is this only one of the many mysteries of Dreamland?"

"It is one of the mysteries of Dreamland, dear; one, and only one, of the evidences of my brother's ingenious skill. Even *I* did not know about it until—— Wait," she broke off in her explanation. They had gone thirty or forty feet farther along the subterranean passageway, Boone imagined.

Judith let go of his hand, and Boone could hear the sound of a key turning in a lock; and a second later a light shone directly into his eyes through a narrow opening in front of them.

"Come," she said; and he followed her up three steps of stone, and into a long and narrow but unusually high room that was entirely bare of furnishings save for a small deal table near the middle of it upon which a tallow candle was burning, consumed almost to the socket.

She closed and fastened the door, and turned to face him.

"Oh, Boone! Boone! Dear, dear Boone!" she cried out, and flew into his arms; and after that, for a long time—an eternity that lasted only a moment it seemed to them—both were silent.

"Great Scott!" Boone ejaculated when they did draw apart and he had used up another moment in gazing about that oddly shaped, high-ceilinged room of stone and cement. "My dear, where are we? Is this strange room inside some sort of a

house? We must be close to the surface of the ground, and that ceiling over our heads is certainly a good deal higher than that."

Judith laughed aloud, happily. Every dread and fear had fallen from her. The grief that she had been suffering, when Boone found her, was forgotten.

"I don't wonder that you are amazed beyond words," she said. "So was I, when Phemie brought me here after old Uncle Zack helped me to get out of my room. I was running away from you, Boone. I did not dare to meet you face to face—here—at Dreamland. I was afraid, dear; oh, I was afraid!"

"Of what, sweetheart? Of me?"

"N-o; and yes. I was afraid lest you would lose—had lost—your faith in me. And Boone, if that should happen, I would die. It would kill me."

"Judith, listen to me. If there were ten thousand Beverleys——"

"Oh, I know, dear. I know, now. I *know!* I only believed, before . . . Boone, dear?"

"Yes, sweetheart?"

"Do you—do you still—want me—for your wife? Do you, Boone?"

"More than I want anything else in all the world, Judith. More than I ever could even think of wanting anything else."

"Will you take me away from Beverley, and Vera, and all of it, just as soon as you can?"

"Right now—this minute—if there is a way to get out of this confounded place. You bet your life I will. But, if we go back to the house together, and if Beverley happened to take the notion to object—— Well, I wouldn't care a hang about his objections, if it were not for that infernal wall across the place, and the iron gate with its alarm-bells. But wait a minute. I had forgotten all about Billy. He is here, too; and he is the best and bulliest friend that a man ever had in this world. But, great Scott! I had forgotten another thing. Fayban is here, too, and he——"

"Fayban?" Judith interrupted him in sudden alarm.

"Yes, Fayban. He just came. Beverley let him inside—God only knows why; to give himself a chance to size up Billy, and me, too, I reckon."

"Did you see him, Boone? Did he see you?"

"No. I saw him first. Say, Judith, dear, where are we? Where is this place that we are in?"

"We are in the middle of the wall that you were just talking about, dear—the high wall with the iron gate near the middle of it," Judith answered.

"Well, what do you think of that!" Boone exclaimed, more amazed than ever.

"You didn't notice how very thick it is," Judith continued. "It narrows where it approaches the

gate, on both sides of it. But the rest of it—Phemie told me all about it, and how she discovered its secrets, too—all of the rest of it is eight or ten feet wide, or thick, or whatever you would call it—and hollow; just like it is right here. And, Boone?”

“Yes, dear?”

“Phemie says that there are a lot of ways to get outside from it, both ways—inside it and outside it. She was coming back to show me, and to help me to get away, as soon as she could. Only she thought that maybe she might have to wait until night before she would dare to come to me again. But, goodness, dear! We haven’t got to stay here in this desolate place. There are better rooms than this one—several of them—with chairs in them to sit down on. Come, dear; bring the candle. I will show you the way.”

“I would give a whole lot, and something to boot, if Billy Cortright were here, right now,” Boone remarked as he picked up the candlestick and held the light aloft, watching Judith, and wondering how in the world they were to get out of that queer, oblong room, otherwise than by the narrow door that had admitted them. The four walls were apparently of solid stone and cement. Nowhere could he discover evidences of a second door. But Judith pulled out the drawer of the small table where the candle had rested, and thrust her hand

into the opening. Then she replaced the drawer, crossed to the farthest end of the room and pushed with both hands against what seemed to be the solid masonry. That portion of the wall fell away from its position, swinging on silent hinges, and disclosed a somewhat low and narrow opening which was, however, adequate. While she was thus occupied, she replied to his remark.

"Do you trust Mr. Cortright as implicitly as all that?" she asked.

"I would trust him anywhere—everywhere—without a question, sweetheart."

"How long have you known him?" She was pushing open the secret door.

"Always. We were boys together; we were schoolmates; then his people went North to live, but, later, we went to the same college and roomed together for four years." Boone followed Judith through the opening, closed it for her, discovering that it was indeed of solid masonry and very heavy, and watched her while she readjusted the fastening that she had operated from beneath the table in the room they had just left. "You need have no fears of Cortright, Judith," he added as he once more followed her lead. "He is all wool and a yard wide. He is solid gold."

Judith made no comment upon that statement. Neither of them spoke again while they traversed three more rooms that were exactly like the first

one in every detail save in the methods of operating the several door-fastenings. No two of those were the same.

So presently they entered one that was much longer—and a trifle wider, Boone imagined—than the others. Directly above the middle of its length, a shaft that was four or five feet square extended a yard or more higher than the ceiling, and an iron ladder reached into it from the floor. Boone remembered the several posts of apparently solid masonry with which the outside of the wall was rendered more pleasing to the eye, and he understood, then, that they were in reality conning towers from which Beverley could observe everything that might happen outside in case he should be forced to hide himself in his ingeniously contrived retreat.

A quick glance around the room when they entered it had told him that they had arrived at the place that Judith was seeking. A thick rug covered the cemented floor. A small table, a tiny desk with drawers, a narrow couch, and two chairs, comprised the furnishings. The walls at both sides and ends were completely covered by Navajo blankets so that not a vestige of the masonry behind them could be seen.

Boone discovered all of that in one sweeping glance around him.

He barely looked at Judith—his astonishment

at the character of the room was too great—or he would have noticed that she came to a sudden stop when her eyes fell upon the small table that has been mentioned; that an expression of alarm shot into her eyes; that she started forward another step and again halted, with indecision depicted in every line of her physical attitude. He would have seen that she was staring wide-eyed at the several articles that were spread upon the tops of the small table and the tiny desk, and that she was breathing quickly, with an emotion that would have suggested to him the condition in which he had discovered her when he found her lying face downward on the floor of the painted cabin.

In reality Judith had rediscovered the very things that had sent her flying from that room with horror and in terror only a few minutes before Boone had found her weeping in despair on the cabin floor.

Temporarily, and in the joy of being again with the man she loved, she had forgotten her grief and its cause.

But there it was before her; all of it; the damning evidence of her brother's guilt; the proof of his felonious career.

Her first impulse when she came upon them the second time was to cover them quickly—to hide them out of sight—to keep Boone Pendleton from

seeing them. Her second, after taking that one step forward, was different.

She turned. Her face was like chalk—but she had decided. She would withhold nothing from the man she loved, and who loved her. “Boone——” she began, and stopped. He was not there, behind her; but instantly his voice answered her from the top of the iron ladder that ascended to the hollow post over the room.

“I can see the whole shooting-match on every side of me, from here, Judith,” he called down to her. “That is, I could if it were daylight outside. Night has fallen since we—— Hello! What’s the matter, sweetheart?”

“Please come down, Boone. I want to talk to you,” she replied. “And you must not use your voice up there. Somebody might hear you.”

He descended quickly. “What is it, Judith?” he asked, with his arms around her.

She pointed silently toward the table and the desk.

He released her and went to them, one after the other. For a moment after that he did not speak. Then he straightened himself slowly, and turned about.

“The counterfeit plates,” he said. “Beverley’s. Your brother’s.”

“Yes,” Judith answered, breathlessly, wide-eyed.

“Did you know that they were here?”

"No, Boone. I found them—accidentally. I did not know. I had hoped—— I—I——"

He sprang to her side and took her into his arms.

CHAPTER XXV

WHEN BEVERLEY BECAME ANXIOUS

It was Billy Cortright who so startled Boone and Judith when he rapped against the door of Uncle Zack's cabin.

He rapped again after waiting a short interval; then he lifted the latch and tried to enter—and thereupon discovered that the door had been barred against him from the inside.

Billy had not the least doubt concerning who had put up the bar—Boone, or Judith, of course. He was quite certain that both of them were inside of the cabin at that very moment, and, not guessing who was at the door, were waiting breathlessly for the unwelcome presence to go away. So he called out to them.

“Open up, Boone, it's Billy,” he announced in low tones. There was no reply. Judith was even then fastening the trap door over her head. “That's funny,” Billy went on, in his thoughts. Then he went around to one of the windows and, shading his eyes with his hands, peered through it.

Twilight was upon that part of the world, but

Billy could see fairly well into the cabin—well enough to discover at once that it was deserted.

He indulged himself in a low whistle of surprise and tried the fastenings of the window; then, with a hasty glance around him, he climbed inside, removed the bar from the door and opened it to let in more light. Then he looked about him.

The cot that Judith had lifted aside remained as she had left it, but it looked as if it always stood in that position, with the head of it instead of one of its sides against the cabin wall. Billy had, in fact, climbed through the window directly upon the trap door through which Boone and Judith had made their escape, but it was so ingeniously contrived, with hard-packed clay like the rest of the floor plastered on the top of it, that even the narrow cracks at its four sides could not readily be seen—would not be discovered at all unless one searched for them—and who would think of finding a secret trap door in the floor of a nigger-cabin? Nobody, certainly, unless there was some good reason for seeking it—as good a reason as Billy Cortright believed he had.

“That cot looks natural enough, with its head instead of one of its sides, against the wall,” he mused, “but it does take up a heap more room than it should in a little two-by-four bunk like this one.”

Being a secret service operative, Billy was provided with certain little conveniences that often

came in handy. One of them was an electric flashlight, so small that he could hide it in the palm of one hand; but, with its aid, and his own shrewd conjecturing, he very quickly discovered the four thread-like cracks that surrounded the trap door, and he understood, perfectly, why they were there.

He knew, also, that the trap door had not been fashioned for lifting, but for lowering, and that it was probably bolted underneath, or fastened by some sort of catch that could be operated from the interior of the cabin, and he spent several moments in a futile effort to find the secret.

"All right," he told himself silently, after the fruitless search for it, "I can wait. I could probably find the thing if I searched long enough, but it's a cinch that the Phemie person will show up after a while. I'll wait." Then he grinned broadly in the gathering darkness, and thought on: "I reckon that Beverley and Vera will both be about as uneasy as a fish on a hook when neither Boone nor I return to help them entertain their latest guest."

He was confident that Phemie's daddie would not return to his cabin until after his supper, but he looked about him for a place of concealment. Having been born in the South himself, he understood the negro character perfectly. He knew that red-hot irons would not force the secret of the trap door from black Phemie's lips. His only method

for discovering it would be to hide, and watch her when she made use of it, and then to use it for himself in his own good time.

There was no place inside where he could hide; that was evident. He went to the door and looked out—and heard the sound of light and rapid foot-falls beyond the rhododendrons. He managed to dodge out of sight behind some bushes only just in time to avoid discovery. Phemie came swiftly up to the door of the cabin.

She paused there, and peered inside. Uncle Zack shuffled onto the scene and stopped beside her.

“Daddie, have yo’ been yere?” Phemie demanded of her father. “Did yo’ leave this do’ open?”

“No,” the old man answered. “I hasn’t been yere, nohow; not since——”

“Then Mis’ Nellie was yere, sure enough. I reckon she got lonesome, an’ come out yere again to wait fo’ me—an’ she must-a found Mr. Pendleton yere, an’ she has taken him back with her. I reckon, daddy, that I’ll jes’ leave them alone fo’ a while. They won’t be wanting any outsiders mixin’ into theh business affairs, jes’ now. Yo’ go along inside, daddy, an’ go to baid; an’ yo’ go to sleep, too. Don’t yo’ dare to open yo’ eyes if yo’ heah anybody movin’ around yo’.”

“Lawd, Phemie, I don’ neveh heah nothin’ afteh I’s gwine ter sleep.”

Phemie flitted away as swiftly and as silently

as a whippoorwill. Uncle Zack went into the cabin, and left the door ajar after him. Billy, behind one of the rhododendron bushes, wondered whether he would wait where he was until Phemie returned or go back to the verandah. He was still wondering, not having moved from his position, when another and a heavier footfall than Phemie's had smote his sense of hearing. He had learned to recognize that step, too, and he knew, even before he caught sight of the approaching figure, that it was Beverley.

CHAPTER XXVI

WHEN BEVERLEY BECAME DESPERATE

THE old negro also heard the sound of Beverley's approach, and reappeared in the cabin doorway. His hearing seemed to be remarkably acute for so old a person. Cortright wondered how Phemie had avoided Beverley in the path, and decided that she had heard his approach soon enough to step aside among the bushes until he had passed her.

"Zack," Beverley demanded sharply, "how long have you been here?"

"Good lawd-a-massy, Mist' Atkins, I's on'y jes' comed, right now, suh."

"Have you seen Miss Nellie, in the last hour or so?"

"No, suh. I ain' seed 'er nohow, nowhere; not since 'long 'bout fo' 'clock when I seed her froo de window when I was watterin' de flow'r baid."

"There was somebody here with you just now. Who was it, Zack?"

"Dat was Phemie, suh. She done come to de cabin wif me to wrastle my baid into shape, an'

ter pull it out from de wall de way I likes ter has it, suh, when I's sleepin' on it."

"Where is she now?"

"She's done gwine back to de house, suh."

"Then why didn't I meet her in the path?"

"Lawd, Mist' Atkins, I dunno. I spec mebbby dat Phemie-gal cut across froo de 'dendron bushes. She's jes' like a sperrit in de open, suh, an' she don't maik no mo' noise agoin' froo de 'dendron bushes dan a mockin' bird would."

"Have you been back here to your cabin since you had your dinner? Since noon?"

"No, sir, I isn't. Dis is the onliest time I's been back yere since I got out-a baid dis mawnin, sho'-nuff"; which same happened to be an entirely truthful statement.

Beverley brushed the old negro aside and stepped into the cabin. Billy, from his place of concealment among the bushes, could see him studying the interior with quick and comprehensive glances—and Billy grinned broadly; for Billy's intuitive perceptions were keen indeed, and his mind leaped to another conclusion in that instant. He decided then and there that Beverley was not aware of the fact that the secret of the trap door in the cabin floor was known to old Uncle Zack and his daughter Phemie. And the expert operative was to discover, later, that his surmise was correct; that no person at Dreamland, save Beverley himself, knew about

the secrets of the big stone wall, nor about the several secret passages that led to its hollow interior. He was to learn that Phemie's knowledge of them was derived from her own intelligent suspicions, and was due to weeks and months of unceasing watchfulness after her suspicions had been aroused. He was conscious of an added respect for black Phemie; she was rapidly proving herself to be an exceedingly intelligent person, and he made up his mind that when he returned to watch for her later that evening, and to follow her into the secret passage, he would have a real heart-to-heart talk with her—as he expressed the idea in his thoughts.

Beverley came outside. As he did so, Vera appeared suddenly and silently upon the scene. Beverley was not aware of her presence—nor was Billy Cortright—until she confronted her husband at the cabin doorway.

“What the devil are you doing out here?” Beverley demanded sharply and ungraciously. Darkness had fallen by that time, but there was a full moon half way to the zenith, that shone upon them. Billy could see that Beverley was frowning angrily.

“I followed you,” she replied. “I saw you come in this direction. Then I met Phemie. She said that she thought you had gone after Zack to give him some orders; and—I *had* to see you alone for a moment. I'm worried; I am frightened half to dea——”

Beverley seized one of her wrists, roughly, and she stopped. "Good night, Zack," he called over his shoulder, and led Vera along the path away from the cabin door.

They passed within a few yards of the spot where Cortright was concealed, and Vera came to a stop before they had gone six feet farther.

"Wait a moment," Billy heard her say in a low tone, to Beverley. "I want to know what you are going to do—what *we* are going to do. What has become of Nell? I have been to her room and found that you had broken the door open when you went there from the dinner table. Her windows are both open; she must have climbed outside through one of them. What has become of her? She couldn't get past the wall, could she, without your knowing it? And the boats—she couldn't use any of them. And where is Mr. Pendleton? And what has become of Billy Cortright? And what are we to do with that beast Fayban?"

It was a long series of comments and questions, but Beverley did not interrupt her. An ironical smile played upon his features in the moonlight. His face was toward Cortright, where they had stopped.

"Have you finished?" he asked his wife, coolly. She nodded, and reached out a hand and rested it on his arm.

"Listen to me," he went on. "Nell is probably

hiding in one of the other cabins, or in the granary, or the boathouse. It doesn't make the slightest difference where she is—she can't get away from Dreamland without my knowledge. Pendleton is doubtless with her, wherever she is. More than likely she saw him seeking her, and called to him, and——”

“But Nell doesn't know him; nor he——”

“Good God, Vera, where are your wits? Aren't you wise to two facts that are staring you in the face—that have been as plain as a pikestaff ever since Horace Fayban showed up?”

“I don't know what you mean, Bud.”

“My dear, there are just exactly two methods by which Fayban could have tracked us to Dreamland. One of them is not a likely one, and the other one is. The unlikely one—and it *may* be the true one for all of that, although I don't think it is, yet—is that Billy Cortright is in the secret service himself; that he has been on my trail ever since, and even before, we first made his acquaintance; that Fayban telephoned to his chief in Washington after he found that we had beat it out of Jasper Center, and that Cortright, if he *is* in the service, was sent to the Union Station to watch for us, spotted Nell, followed her down here, and then waited in the road for us.”

“Good heavens! Billy Cortright a——”

“Wait. I said that that is unlikely. It is; but

it may be the truth, all the same! and I'm going to play the game from now on just as if it were true. Cortright and Fayban will both live long enough to regret that they ever came to Dreamland—but—take it from me, Vera, neither of them will live long enough to get away from it. Fayban's obituary was in the writing when he rang the alarm at the gate; and Cortright's was in preparation when I permitted Fayban to come inside. I didn't let him in just for the pleasure of letting him out again. I'll take them both for a nice walk across the quaking-bog, to-morrow morning, after breakfast, and I'll have two or three of the niggers, chasing along after us—for witnesses—to swear, if necessary, how hard I tried to get my guests out of the quicksands after they had stumbled into them. It's the quicksand for theirs, now, Vera; and I'll see that Pendleton gets into it too—only—I'll manage to pull *him* out. Come on. Let's get back to the house."

"Wait just a moment, Bud; please!" Vera gasped. She offered no protest against the frightful thing that Beverley threatened, but Cortright could see that her fingers were interlocked and straining against each other, and it was apparent that she shuddered, and spoke with an effort. "What—what was the other—if Billy Cortright is not a——" She stopped. Her teeth were chattering. Evidently murder was not among the possi-

bilities of her conception of desperate remedies.

"It's as plain as day, now that Fayban is here, that Pendleton was the chap at the bungalow where Nell found refuge from the storm," Beverley interrupted, taking her by the arm with the intention of moving on up the path. But she resisted, and he added: "The other method that I spoke about—the likely one—is that Fayban trusted to his chief, and the other operatives, to round *us* up, after he found that we had escaped; and himself took the trail of Pendleton, believing that sooner or later Pendleton would lead him to Nell; and knowing that Nell"—he forced Vera to move along beside him, to the path—"would eventually bring him to us. That is the" . . . His voice trailed into a murmur and then died out altogether. Both disappeared around a bend in the path.

"That's a nice, pleasant little stroll that Beverley has mapped out for Hoddie and Billy to take tomorrow morning, I don't think!" was Cortright's semi-audible comment made to himself as soon as they had gone; and, while he followed slowly after them, he added, mentally: "I wonder if Beverley has got the sand to try it? By jingo, I actually believe he has."

CHAPTER XXVII

A STRUGGLE IN THE PATHWAY

It does not matter how Billy Cortright accomplished the feat, but the fact remains that when Beverley and Vera returned to the verandah he was there, perched upon the rail, chatting with Fayban, as unconcerned, as debonair, as red-headed and as freckled as ever. A cigar was tilted at a sharp angle from the corner of his mouth, and both men were laughing heartily, exactly as if the last story that had been told had proved to be an exceptionally good one.

"Hello, Billy," Beverley said, looking at him sharply. "We missed you. Where have you been?"

"Oh, wandering around—down by the shore—over near the big wall—along the edge of the pond—out among the cabins—just snooping—and incidentally smashing the tenth commandment into smithereens. Say, Tony, if I owned a place like Dreamland, and a dough-bag that would run it, I'd be the happiest man alive. I'd get some rest, too."

"It is a fine old place, Billy, and there are lots

of interesting things about it, too. The quaking-bog, for instance, where there is a tree that's a foot and a half in diameter at the stump, that you can shake as if it were a sapling. Then there is the pond, and the spring close to its edge that apparently ought to be salt, but is as sweet and pure and cold as can be. And the oysters, and the——"

"What's that quaking-bog place, Tony?"

"It is a curiosity, all right. It is dangerous, too, if one isn't careful. Possibly I ought not to take you there."

"But what is it? What makes it dangerous?"

"Oh, it isn't really dangerous, you know, if one is careful, and knows where to step, and where not to—or, if one follows the instructions of somebody who does know. It is a short distance into the woods over toward the Machodac side, where a grove of white ash has grown up out of a swamp that was formerly covered with water. The roots of the trees have interlaced; sand, and decaying leaves, and sediment, have clung to them! moss—a queer, elastic kind of moss, as thick as a velvet carpet and almost as tough—has grown there, probably for generations; soil has collected, or Nature has manufactured it, until the whole place—there is about half an acre of it—that was once covered by water with quicksands beneath it, is turned into an area that is as stable and as resilient as a box-spring bed. You can jump up and down on it and

shake every tree within sight; you can grasp some of the smaller trees and pull them over until their tops touch the moss, and when you release them they fly back into their former positions and tremble and quiver as if they protested against what you had done."

"Gee! I'd like to see that place," Billy said. "Eh, Fayban?" The operative nodded.

"I will show it to you in the morning, after breakfast," Beverley agreed. Then he asked: "What has become of"—he hesitated for the briefest instant, and shot a glance at Fayban as he added the name—

"Pendleton?"

Beverley was rewarded for his cleverness. Fayban gave a quick start, realized that he could not conceal it, and, before Cortright could reply to the question, inquired, sharply:

"Who? What name did you say? Pendleton? Do you mean Boone Pendleton? I know him, I think."

"Sure, Mike," Cortright interposed, answering for Beverley. "Boone Pendleton. He is an old friend of mine, Mr. Fayban; we were college-chums together. I'm surprised that you should happen to know him."

"Mr. Pendleton is our other guest, Mr. Fayban; the one you have not yet seen," Vera announced in her sweetest tones. "He has unaccountably dis-

appeared since dinner. I do hope, Tony"—she turned toward Beverley—"that he has not wandered into the quaking-bog. It would be too terrible." She returned her attention to her guests. "One of the negroes who was new to the place wandered into it last summer while we were at Lake George and stepped into one of the soft places. Some of the others heard him calling, but they got to him too late. The quicksands swallowed him. It is a dreadful place—it's *so* treacherous."

Beverley got upon his feet.

"Perhaps," he said, hesitatingly, "I ought to take a lantern and go in search of him."

"A lantern? On such a moonlight night as this one?" Cortright laughed.

"It is dark in there all the same, Billy. It isn't any too light in the daytime."

"Oh; were you thinking of looking for Pennie in the bog?"

"Yes. Would you and Fayban like to come along? We will summon two or three of the niggers to go with us. It may be that——" He stopped. Cortright laughed aloud.

"No fear," he said. "Pennie wouldn't be nosing around in a place of that sort. I know him too well for that. In my opinion, he has——"

"Oh, he will doubtless return, shortly," Vera hastened to interrupt him before he might, as she feared, mention the name of the other person who

was missing. It was no part of her plans, nor Beverley's, that Horace Fayban should hear Judith mentioned by either of her given names, or by her surname. The man might be kept quiescent as long as he was expectant of her arrival. Indeed he had as much as said so when they admitted him inside of the wall.

"I was going to say," Billy drawled, grinning so that his freckles winked in the moonlight, "that he has probably gone oystering with one of the niggers. Oysters are his long suit. He likes them for breakfast; anyhow, he used to."

Everybody but Fayban laughed aloud. He was angry. He thought that Cortright should have told him of Pendleton's presence at Dreamland, for Cortright had known by the reports that Fayban had telegraphed and telephoned from Jasper Center that Pendleton was the name of the man of the bungalow episode. Fayban was distinctly irritated.

"I think that I will take a short stroll myself," he announced, starting from his chair. Then he turned his back upon them and passed through the hall to the opposite entrance, and disappeared.

Cortright's ever-ready laugh followed him, and when it fell upon Horace Fayban's ears it made him all the angrier. He started swiftly away, totally unmindful and utterly indifferent concerning the direction he took, but in reality heading directly

toward a path through the bushes along which Boone Pendleton was, at that same moment, approaching him.

Back on the verandah, Beverley also got out of his low chair, lazily, indifferently, with a perfect assumption of unhaste—although Billy did not doubt that he would have broken into a run, had he dared, in order to follow after Fayban and discover where the man was bound; or to prevent him from encountering anything that Beverley did not wish him to know, or see.

"Entertain Billy, Vera," he said. "I'll be back in a moment." From the doorway he asked: "Port or sherry, old chap? Which do you prefer? Or shall it be a glass of champagne?"

"Any old thing at all, Tony," Cortright called back to him; and turned at once to Vera. "Do you know," he said to her, "I rather suspect that Tony's sister is keeping herself out of sight on my account. I suppose he told her that I was here, or she got a peek at me—and vanished. I guess I must have bored her considerable, and then some, last summer. And as for Pennie—— Well, my suspicions are busy there, too."

"What is your idea about him?" Vera asked.

"I think that he has just naturally run into the lady, somewhere around the place, and that they have scraped up an acquaintance, and are, right now, having the horse laugh on the rest of us while

they moon around down on the shore, or sit under an arbor—and begin the delicate operation of falling madly in love with each other. I'm jealous—horribly jealous! That's what's the matter! Don't I look it?"

"Hardly," Vera smiled archly upon him. "Not with me sitting here next to you. You used to say——"

"Gee! Did I? Say; suppose we take a stroll, too. Maybe we'll run across 'em."

"Possibly we may," she replied, rising.

Billy guided her down the steps and along the graveled path that would take them past a window of one of the smaller rooms that adjoined the dining-room. He had already discovered that it was the housekeeper's official headquarters, and he wanted to assure himself that Phemie was there, notwithstanding his belief that she would not attempt to go to Miss Ralston through the secret passageway until the house was quiet, and she, herself, would be supposed to have gone to bed.

He saw her through the open window, with an embroidery-ring held in one hand while she busily employed a needle with the other one. After that he guided his companion contentedly toward the end of the point.

Beverley, when he went out, stopped at the foot of the steps that Fayban had descended not three minutes ahead of him, and shot glances in every

direction in an effort to determine which direction Fayban had taken.

There seemed to be no way of deciding that point, however, and after a moment he shrugged his shoulders and turned back into the house.

"Let him go," Beverley was thinking. "He can't get out; and even if he should signal to somebody outside that somebody can't get in."

He was on the point of returning to the verandah, but he could hear Vera and Billy as they started for their stroll, and decided differently. He remembered that there was a detail in regard to certain articles in one of the rooms in the hollow wall that needed attention at once. They were safe enough where they were, to be sure; but they would be infinitely more secure in their proper hiding place that had been made expressly for them. So, instead of returning to the verandah, he went into the library, and pulled one of the bookcases away from the wall after he had manipulated a certain secret device that released it. Then he passed behind it and through an opening that had been thus disclosed. From there he pulled the bookcase back to its former position and was gone.

Outside, in the pathway, at approximately the same moment, Boone Pendleton and Horace Fayban met face to face at a point where the moonlight shone full upon them, neither having heard the approach of the other.

Both were astounded. Both, for the first instant, lost the power of speech.

Then Fayban's right hand shot toward the pocket where he carried a weapon, and Boone, perceiving the act, jumped forward and grabbed him by both wrists. Neither man uttered a sound. But both struggled mightily.

It was Boone's intention merely to disarm Fayban, and then to make terms with him, if that were possible. Just what Fayban's intentions were at the moment does not appear.

The slightest sort of accident will sometimes determine great events—as one did just then.

At the beginning of the struggle Fayban stepped upon something that tripped him, or threw him, and he fell, with Boone on top, and struck his head against a projecting stone that knocked the consciousness entirely out of him.

Boone was startled when he sprang to his feet and stood over his fallen foe. The man might easily have been killed by such a fall.

But he was quickly reassured. Fayban was not dead, nor even injured. He was stunned, that was all, as Pendleton very soon discovered.

For half a moment Boone stood there looking down upon him, wondering what might be the outcome of it all. Then he chuckled in response to a thought that occurred to him.

“Why not?” he asked himself aloud, answering

it. "I can make terms with Fayban all right once I get him inside of the wall—and he won't know where the blazes he is at either. I'll do it."

On another occasion Boone Pendleton had made use of the handcuffs that Fayban carried about with him, in one of his pockets. (Some officers prefer never to be without them, and Fayban was one.) Boone sought for them, and found them, and made use of them.

He locked them on Fayban's wrists behind his back. He used his own handkerchief to blindfold the operative so that the man would have no idea where he was being taken if he should rouse to consciousness. Then, without great effort, for Pendleton was almost phenomenally strong of muscle, he lifted Fayban in his arms, swung him like a bag of meal across his shoulder, and started away with him toward Uncle Zack's cabin, and the entrance to the secret passage that would presently take him back again to Judith.

He was smiling, too, as he hurried onward. He was thinking:

"I wonder what Judith will say when she discovers what I am taking to her. She will be surprised, all right; but, all the same, once I get Fayban inside of that wall I'll make terms with him or I'll know the reason why."

It never occurred to him that even a greater surprise was awaiting him—and Judith, as well.

CHAPTER XXVIII

INSIDE THE WALL

JUDITH sat quite alone in the room where the conning tower extended into the square post of the Dreamland wall over her head.

The several plates for the printing of counterfeit bills that she had discovered wholly by accident in a secret drawer of the tiny desk—by tripping on the rug and stumbling against it and unconsciously touching and releasing the spring that controlled the drawer—had been restored to their hiding place. She was awaiting the return of Boone Pendleton, who had gone to the house to find Phemie, and to procure from her something for Judith to eat; for Judith had been reminded by unmistakable longings that she had had no dinner—had eaten nothing at all since a light luncheon at midday.

It had been agreed between them that Phemie was to be told to take the food to Judith, thus leaving Boone free to appear once more among those who no doubt had been wondering not a lit-

tle at his continued absence, and to account, as best he might, for his mysterious disappearance.

Every possibility concerning what Fayban might say or do when Boone should confront him had been discussed between them; and Boone had succeeded in convincing Judith that it was highly advisable that he should take Billy Cortright entirely into his confidence—for he had unlimited belief in the sterling loyalty of his friend.

One thing more had been decided upon.

They would leave Dreamland together that very night, as soon as Judith had satisfied her hunger, and Phemie could guide them to one of the exits from the great walls into the open world beyond its boundaries.

Yet, when Judith seated herself to wait, immediately after the departure of her lover, she was disturbed and sorrowful. Everything save the one bright and warming glow of Boone's devotion seemed dark and terrible to contemplate.

Judith loved her brother.

As a child she had idealized him, and had worshiped that ideal. She had made a god of him, just as a little girl with a loving heart is likely to do with a handsome brother who is ten years her senior, especially when they have been left fatherless and motherless, and when he is all that remains for her to love.

When, six months before, Judith had been com-

as b pelled to the knowledge of Beverley's wrong-doing
and had been convinced of his unlawful practices,
it had nearly killed her. She had contemplated
suicide, so deep had been her anguish. Later she
had decided to hide herself away from him—but
always she had postponed the time of her going,
and put it farther and farther away from her;
always she had hoped against hope that there were
extenuating circumstances which one day would
come to her knowledge that would excuse, even if
they did not acquit her brother, of the deliberate
and premeditated intention to do wrong. In her
heart, woman-like, and because she found it impos-
sible to believe the worst of Beverley, she had
charged all of his errors to Vera—until the moment
of her tripping on the rug and the disclosure of the
counterfeit plates that immediately followed the ac-
cident.

The secret drawer in the tiny desk had contained
other articles than the plates, all tied in the one
package—all being a part of the revelation that
Beverley's guilt was all and entirely his own, and
that Vera was not only ignorant of it, but had taken
no part in his illegal acts until long after he be-
came well established in his career of crime.

So Judith, convinced even against her will of
Beverley's sole responsibility for all that he had
done, had been at first paralyzed with horror, then
furiously angry—and finally racked with anguish;

and she had fled through the secret passage into Uncle Zack's cabin and thrown herself face down on the earthen floor, where Boone had found her.

She was quite calm when Boone left her to procure the food and to begin the consummation of their plans. They had discussed each and every phase of the conditions that surrounded them.

He had been gone only a very few minutes, however, had barely had time to pass through Uncle Zack's cabin into the open air, when Judith recalled to mind that in peering out from the conning tower over her head that afternoon when Phemie had taken her there she had marveled at Beverley's ingenuity in the arrangement of it; and, what was more important, the view to be obtained from its peepholes. A certain geometrical method in the trimming of trees and bushes without had unfolded many vistas from the interior of the post that Beverley might some day find useful if he should be driven to hide himself there. They radiated from the four sides of the small observatory like the spokes of a wheel.

Judith started to her feet and mounted the iron ladder. She knew that there was moonlight outside; she believed that she would be able to catch glimpses of Boone whilst he traversed the path between the cabin and the house.

The air was unusually clear that night; the moon unusually bright. Outside it was "as light as day"

—an expression which is never quite true, but which sometimes approaches nearly to verity.

Her first quick glance toward the path that Boone must follow, where the trimmed-out aisles of trees and bushes revealed it, did not discover him. She had known already that he could not have gone so far as yet.

Another aisle extended toward the piazza steps at the landward side of the house, and Judith looked in that direction at the very moment when Horace Fayban came out and started away with rapid steps directly toward the entrance to the path that eventually must lead him to the cabin of Uncle Zack.

Judith gasped at the thought of the possibilities that might follow. Then she smiled. At all events, she told herself, the two men would meet where other eyes and other ears could not bear witness to what might happen when they confronted one another in the narrow path—and she had every confidence in her lover's ability to come off victorious in any encounter that might occur, whether physical or merely verbal.

She shot a second glance toward the piazza, and saw her brother advance from the doorway to the top of the steps, pause there, look hastily about him, and disappear into the house again. Then her eyes sought Fayban's figure along one, and then another, of the aisles of vision—and lighted upon the widest of them at the very instant when

Pendleton and Fayban stepped into view from either side of it and confronted each other.

The struggle that followed was so soon over with and Boone was so quickly the victor that Judith had no time to become alarmed. She saw her lover's hesitancy after it, saw him presently lift Fayban to his shoulder, and retrace his steps toward the cabin, and she understood.

She descended the ladder at once. She lighted a candle and then extinguished the lamp that had been in use. She left the room, passing through the several concealed doorways by which she had conducted Boone into the interior of the wall, and so along the passage to Uncle Zack's cabin, where she unfastened the trap-door and pulled it down, in readiness for Boone and his burden, and waited.

Uncle Zack was snoring peacefully on his cot. The faint sounds of Boone's approaching footsteps came to her. She called up to him in a whisper as soon as he paused above her, and helped him to lower his burden through the sparse opening.

Fayban stirred, and attempted to struggle, by the time they arrived at the few short steps that led up to the entrance to the hollow wall, but Pendleton sternly bade him be silent. Judith did not speak.

"Can you stand?" Boone asked his prisoner as soon as they were inside, and the narrow door was closed behind them; and, without waiting for a reply, stood him on his feet so that his hands, fastened

behind him as they were, could grip the edge of the little table—the only article of furniture in that room.

“You will pay for this, Pendleton,” Fayban exclaimed, angrily. “Take this bandage off of my eyes. Where in hell are we?”

Boone motioned to Judith to get behind Fayban, out of his sight. Then he removed the hoodwinking handkerchief from Fayban’s eyes.

“You are where you can’t get out, and where nobody is likely to get in,” Boone told him, quietly. “I have brought you here to make terms with you, and——”

“You’ll make no terms with me, Pendleton, not if you keep me here a thousand years,” was the savage interruption and retort.

“Oh, I’m not so sure about that. For example: Bud Beverley is a counterfeiter, isn’t he? That is your charge against him, isn’t it?”

“Yes. What are you driving at, anyhow?”

“Just reply to my questions; don’t ask any—yet. What are the several denominations of the bills that he is charged with having imitated?”

“Oh, hell, Pen——”

“Answer me, and don’t be vulgar, nor profane. It doesn’t help matters, nor hasten them in the least. How many counterfeit plates is Beverley charged with using?”

“Four.”

"What are they?"

"A ten, a twenty, a hundred—and there is some suspicion that there is also a thousand-dollar-bill plate in the collection. Somebody has made use of one, and Beverley is probably 'It'."

"Very well, Fayban. Now, if those four plates—— By the way, are they considered good ones?"

"They are practically perfect. So is the paper he uses. The man is a genius. Let me tell you something: Every expert counterfeit plate maker, even Brockway, who in his day was the greatest of them all, has possessed that old quality of egotism that makes him wish to recognize the work of his own hands when it happens to come into his possession after he has put it in circulation. Consequently he puts an identifying mark on his own plates which will enable him to spot his own 'queer' the moment he sees it—and which he confidently believes that nobody else will be able to find. That little fact has been the undoing of every counterfeiter who ever played the game. Our experts have always found the identifying marks, have notified the banks, and there you are."

"I assume from what you say that Beverley has omitted that important mark?" Boone inquired.

"Yes, he has."

"Well, then, now for the question I began and did not finish. If those four plates were there at

your right hand, and Bud Beverley and everybody who is associated with him were at your left hand, which——”

“I’d take the whole shooting match, if that’s what you mean.”

“But if you could not. If you only had the choice between them. You would take the plates, wouldn’t you, and let the people go—and forget them? The Government would accept the plates, and let the counterfeiters go, rather than send the counterfeiters to prison and not recover the plates; that is true, isn’t it? It would be a feather in your cap, Fayban, to recover those plates on any conditions, wouldn’t it?”

“Yes—to both questions.”

“Very well. Judith, step forward where Mr. Fayban can see you. Now, Fayban, this is Miss Ralston; please bear that in mind. She is Beverley Ralston’s sister. She has played no guilty part in this counterfeiting business, ever; she has had guilty knowledge concerning it only during the last six months. She has made no use whatever of the money that her brother has given her, since then, having relied solely upon her own moderate personal income from her father’s estate. She has found the plates that we have been talking about. She can put her hands on them, and deliver them to you, in three minutes. She offers to deliver them to you—all four of them—in exchange for entire

immunity for her brother, for her brother's wife, for herself, and for any other person who may be either actively or morally, or even inadvertently, concerned in this affair. What do you say to that, Mr. Horace Fayban? It is up to you."

Fayban hesitated. Over at the end of the room above the secret door that opened upon the one adjoining it there was a small round hole that pierced the partition, and which neither Pendleton nor Judith knew about. Beverley's eyes had taken turns with his ears, at that hole, since the very beginning of the strange interview; but they were withdrawn entirely when Pendleton added, following Fayban's hesitancy to commit himself:

"Come. We will show them to you. You can decide, after you have seen them, what your answer will be."

CHAPTER XXIX

THE OTHER SIDE OF BEVERLEY

It has been said that there were two sides to Beverley Ralston; or, rather, to Bud Beverley; a loving and lovable one, and its opposite. It has not yet been told, although it has possibly been surmised, that he idolized his sister.

Above and beyond all things else, his devotion to her was supreme.

In his own estimation his felonious career was as nothing when compared to his carelessness and thoughtlessness in permitting her to become mixed up with his affairs, and, when he turned away from that peephole, and knew that she, and Pendleton, and Fayban, would follow after him at once, his impulses were many, and as conflicting as they were numerous.

He had entered the hollow wall by a passageway that connected with it beyond the room that held the tiny desk and the counterfeit plates. He had gone there to get the latter and to transfer them and the memoranda with them, to another room inside of the wall, at the opposite side of the

wrought-iron gate with its enormous square posts of stone and cement. But he had caught the odor of the lately extinguished lamp, and had gone on from room to room, using the peepholes between them, until he came upon the explanation of it.

He peered into the last of the rooms at the moment when Pendleton removed the bandage from Fayban's eyes; thus he saw and heard all that occurred.

His first emotion upon making the discovery was insensate rage that his secret hiding places were known to others than himself; and from that moment on his impulses ran the gamut of every emotion that a passionate, intolerant and physically fearless person can experience.

There were moments when he could have made use of another secret of that strange place, and left all three of the occupants of the adjoining room to perish, painlessly, by the fumes of certain acids he might have released; there were other moments when his soul whispered to his better self, "Why not? Why not?" When he came away from the peephole and hurried back toward the room with the tiny desk his rapid steps as he took them punctuated "I will! I won't! I will! I won't! Why not? Why not? Why not?"

Within the room he hesitated, yet knowing that there was not a moment to spare.

The choice was between leaving the plates where

they were, and so permitting Pendleton and Judith to proceed with the bargaining, . . . and taking them away with him, and so to leave his sister to be crestfallen and ashamed, and hopeless as well as helpless.

There was still another choice that he had to make in that short moment that was left to him; a far more important one—an unconscionably greater one. But to his credit be it said that when it occurred to him he put it quickly aside as being wholly dependable on the first one.

The thing that he did do was to pass out of sight at that end of the room opposite where Judith and Pendleton with their prisoner entered it a few seconds after he had gone.

The plates remained as Judith had left them.

He left them to their bargaining. He did not remain to spy upon them from any peephole. In that brief moment of hesitation between the thresholds of two decisions, a great and sudden peace fell upon his restless spirit; the light of a new purpose glowed in his eyes. He knew what he would do.

It was as if the memory of his mother had spoken aloud to him; as if the spirit of his father stood beside him; as if his beloved sister had become a child again, as when she was left parentless to his protection and care.

He was smiling when he closed behind him the secret door that Judith did not know about. He

was humming an air from his favorite opera when he stepped from behind the movable book-shelves into the library of his home. His face, the expression in his eyes, even his voice, were transfigured when he touched the electric button that would summon Phemie.

She responded at once, and she saw the change in him, in his bearing, in his manner of speaking—and even Phemie marveled, voicelessly.

“Find Mrs. Atkins for me, Phemie,” he directed. “Send her to me, here, please.”

“Yes, sir. Mrs. Atkins an’ Mr. Cortright are out by the rose-bower right now.”

“Thank you. I don’t want Mr. Cortright. Send Mrs. Atkins to me alone. And, Phemie?”

“Yes, sir?”

“I think that Miss Nellie wants you. You know where she is, and how she got there. Don’t be frightened, Phemie. I think you must be the one who found the trap-door in the floor of your daddy’s cabin. There, there. Don’t worry. No harm has been done. But obey me in this: When you have sent Mrs. Atkins to me, go at once to Miss Nellie—and take Mr. Cortright with you. I mean it. Go, now.”

Phemie delivered the message in a daze. Her eyes were big and round with wonder, and she was frightened, too, when she appealed to Cortright as soon as Vera left them.

"Please come with me, Mr. Cortright," she pleaded, quickly. "Something has happened—— I don't know what it is."

She darted away at once, and Billy followed. He guessed where she was taking him, and he was alarmed. He was not surprised when she led him directly toward Uncle Zack's painted cabin.

In the library Beverley awaited Vera beside the movable bookshelves. The way behind them was open. The entrance to the secret passage beyond them was visible. Vera gasped when she saw, and understood.

"Come, Vera," Beverley said to her, reaching out a hand for her to grasp. "I want you with me."

"Is—— Is it——" she began, tremulously; and he answered:

"Yes, Vera—it is. Come, dear. I want you with me—more now than ever before."

CHAPTER XXX

THE MIRACLE

TOWARD the Machodac, from the gateway through the wall, the direction was easterly. Beverley turned into an arm of the underground passage he had previously followed, and led his wife into the western half—the Nomini side of the gate.

She tried to question him as they hurried onward, but he replied only by the one word, "Wait!" repeating it each time that she spoke to him. She knew about the wall, that it was hollow, and that there were many secret entrances to its rooms. She had often begged Beverley to show her its mysteries, but he had steadfastly refused—till then. The fact that he was taking her there at last, and so quietly, frightened her.

The room into which he finally conducted her was not essentially different from that one in the eastern half of the wall where the bargaining for the plates was even then interesting three persons to the point of intensity.

"Oh, Beverley," Vera cried out as soon as they entered it, "what has happened? What is the mat-

ter, dear? I am almost frightened to death. Have they—has Fayban——”

“Vera,” he interrupted her, and reaching out his arms toward her—she had not observed the very apparent change in him until that moment—“Vera,” he repeated, more softly, “once, before I went wrong and dragged you down with me you loved me. Is there any of that old love left, Vera, dear? . . . the sweet kind? . . . the pure kind? . . . that same dear love that you gave to me when you saw only the good that was in me, and knew nothing about the bad? If there is, Vera, come to me now. Put your arms around my neck just as you used to do, and kiss me.”

“Why, Beverley!” she cried out. Her face flushed like a girl’s. Her eyes sparkled. The moisture of unshedable tears, product of sudden joy, suffused them.

She flew into his arms. She clung to him. She kissed him. She snuggled her face against his.

“Beverley! Dear Beverley,” she murmured, brokenly, close to his ear, “does it mean—does all this mean, dear, that you are going to be—good? Is that it, dear? . . . That you are going to be good?”

“Yes, Vera. I am going to be good . . . and so are you . . . from this time forth forever—evermore.”

“Thank God! Oh, thank God!” Vera cried out

in ecstasy, and fell to weeping with the joy that had come to her so unexpectedly.

A few moments later Beverley unclasped Vera's arms from around his neck and put her gently down upon one of the chairs.

"Are you happier, Vera?" he asked her.

"Happier? I am so happy, dear, that I could not be happier. I have got my Beverley back again. That hateful 'Bud' is dead, and buried so deep that he will never be resurrected. Everything that has happened since 'he' came between my Beverley and me has been a dream, dear. Now, we are awake again. Now we will live. Now we will be real. No more will I have to make eyes at people, and flirt with men, and be false, and pretend that I am happy? Oh, oh, oh! Is it all true, Beverley? Are you sure that it is quite true?"

"Yes, Vera, it is quite true."

"Have you given up the plates? Have they promised——"

"Vera?"

"Yes, dear?"

"I am going through to the other half of the wall. Nell, and Pendleton, and Fayban are there together. The plates are there. I have told Phemie to take Billy Cortright there, too. And, now, I am going there myself."

"What has Billy Cort——"

"Never mind. It does not matter, dear. I don't

want you to ask questions; not even one, please. I want you to promise me, now, that you will do exactly as I ask; that you will not object to anything that I suggest."

"Why, of *course*, Beverley. The idea!"

"That sounded like the old Vera that has just come alive again in the last few minutes."

"It is. What do you want me to do?" Vera asked.

"I want you to wait here, where you are, patiently, until I return. I may be gone fifteen minutes; it may be an hour; it is barely possible that it may be even longer than that; but I will return to you just as soon as I can. Will you be patient?"

"Surely. . Am I not the happiest woman in all Virginia at this very moment?"

"You certainly look the part, little girl."

"Beverley, dear?"

"Yes, Vera?"

"May I ask just one question—the teeniest-weeniest one?"

"Yes."

"What has happened to you? What has changed you? Please tell me."

"I don't know. God, in His mysterious way, has worked the miracle. That is the only answer that I can give you, Vera."

He bent forward and lifted her from the chair

into his arms. He held her so for a moment, and kissed her, and put her down again.

Then he turned abruptly away, and Vera saw him pass through one of the mysteriously concealed doorways and disappear; but there was a happy and contented smile glowing in her baby-blue eyes while she composed herself to await Beverley's return.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE AGREEMENT

“You see,” said Horace Fayban, “there is positively only one way to carry out these ideas of yours, Pendleton, and yours, Miss Ralston, and that is for all the persons concerned to go with me to my chief in Washington when I deliver these plates to him, or, if you prefer, to follow me there a day later. Beverley and his wife and Miss Ralston must submit themselves to the judgment of my chief, and then, through him, must throw themselves upon the mercy of the authorities over him. There is no other way. I have neither the power nor the authority to bargain with you beyond the point of agreeing and promising to do all that I can do to bring about the conclusion of this affair that you desire. I might make the promises you demand, and receive the plates—and you might suppose, later, that I had purposely deceived you, because I could not fulfill my promises. . . .

“I won’t do that; I cannot do it. The power to do it does not rest in me. But I can and do say to you both, freely and frankly, that there is not the



slightest doubt remaining in my mind that the chief, when he hears the story as I shall tell it, and as I am now thoroughly convinced is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, will use his influence, which is very great, to the end that entire immunity be granted to all concerned . . . and I have not the least doubt that the authorities over him will grant the requests he will make, on his representations.

"But that is the only way; or, as the darkies down here would say, 'It is the onliest way.' You have told me, Pendleton, that you know already that Billy Cortright is one of us, so I will add this: If Billy Cortright were here with us right now——"

"As happens to be the case," Billy's voice startled them, proceeding from the end of the room where Phemie had opened the door so silently that none of the three had heard it, "I am here, Hoddie," he added, advancing to join them. "I have been here long enough to overhear your remarks; and so, if you don't mind, old chap, suppose you let me have the floor for a minute or so. Phemie, sit down. Miss Ralston, how do you do?"

"I don't know—yet," Judith replied. "Do you think, Mr. Cortright, that Phemie might be spared long enough to return to the house and bring me something to eat? I am——"

"Hurry, Phemie," Cortright interrupted her. "Now," he added, when Phemie had gone, and ad-

dressing Judith directly, "all that Fayban has told you is true. It is the only thing to do. You must throw yourselves upon the mercy of the men higher up than Fayban and I are. You will be willing to do that, I do not doubt; and I will say for Beverley and his wife, as well as for you, that I will add my own intercessions to Fayban's, and that I can almost promise you what you wish; which means, being translated, that I haven't a shadow of a doubt that we will succeed. Will you trust me that far, Miss Ralston?"

"Yes, freely," Judith answered.

"I ought to tell you, Billy," Fayban said, "that all four of the plates that have given us so much worry—including the thousand-dollar one—are here, in a drawer of this desk. I have examined them. More than that, Beverley's memoranda is all here, showing exactly the number of bills he has put into circulation, and when and where it has all been done. Still more, the memoranda shows that between three and four hundred thousand dollars of the bogus money is hidden away somewhere inside of this stone wall, and Miss Ralston believes that her brother will cheerfully surrender all of it—in case we can carry this thing through. And there is one more circumstance. This: There isn't anywhere near the amount of this 'queer' in circulation that we supposed. Beverley, as is proved by this memoranda, has made and used it only for his

own needs and pleasures. He has not peddled it about indiscriminately. And, as you know, the counterfeits are so perfectly made that——”

“Yes, yes. I know the rest; but also I am glad to know what you have just told. Now, Miss Ralston?”

“Yes, Mr. Cortright?”

“Do you believe that you can prevail upon your brother to make the same promise that you have just made—to throw himself upon the mercy of those higher up?”

“I think she can.”

Beverley’s voice replied to the question before Judith could answer. Another door had opened silently, and Beverley stood just beyond it, looking smilingly in upon them. They, in their turn, were on their feet, staring amazedly at him.

“Sit down, please,” he said, calmly. “I am not going inside. I shall shoot off my little talk-fest from here. I find it amazingly healthier. As I said before, in reference to the question you have just asked my sister, Billy—and, by the way, I am not greatly surprised to find that you are an operative in the service of our esteemed uncle—as I said before, *I think she can*. But, like the sword of Damocles, and the sun, moon and stars, and other things, it all depends. . . . Billy, will you answer a few questions for me, just to satisfy a curious whim of mine?”



Another door had opened silently, and Beverley stood just beyond it, looking smilingly in upon them

"Sure—if I can."

"If I were dead, or had disappeared, or was out of it entirely, could you promise, as the case now stands, to quash the whole blooming business as against my sister and my wife?"

"Yes," Billy replied without an instant of hesitation.

"Would you do it?"

"Yes."

Beverley reached behind him, and then tossed four neatly tied packages into the room.

"There is the rest of the 'queer,' " he said; "some four hundred and thirty-odd thousand dollars of it, as the memoranda will show; and I have no doubt that you fellows in Washington have accounted for pretty nearly all the rest of it before this. Is that correct, Billy?"

"Approximately so."

"Well, here is the next question: If I were to make my bow to you now, and close this door, which none of you knows how to open—if I leave you now, and go away, and perform the act so thoroughly well that you can never find me—*never* find me, mind you!—will the promise that you just made concerning my sister still hold good?"

"Sure thing, Beverley; only——"

"Only what?"

"The department will hang to your trail, in that case, until you are captured—or dead."

"I am quite content as to that, Billy," Beverley replied, soberly. "Is it a go? Wait, before you answer. I am not going to Washington with you. I am not going there at all, to throw myself upon the mercy of anybody; nor is Vera. I am going to close this door, presently, and disappear—and take my chances, and Vera's chances, thereafter. So, now, as to the promise concerning my sister: Does it stand? Yes, or no, Cortright. I'd trust you to the end of the world, little as I really know you. Yes, or no?"

"Yes."

"Good. Wait a minute, Nell-girl," he added quickly, when Judith started to her feet with her arms stretched out toward him. "In just a moment, little sister. I am not going away from you without saying good-by. That settles that part of it, Cortright. I have still one more request."

"Shoot it, Beverley. Shoot. I think it's granted before it is asked. What is it?"

"I want to hold a short, private conversation with my sister and Mr. Pendleton, if you please. I would like to have them both come in here with me. I will close the door after them. They will return to you within fifteen or twenty minutes, or so."

"Go ahead, Miss Ralston. Go on, Pennie," Billy directed.

Judith had her arms around her brother's neck

and was clinging to him when Boone stepped through the narrow doorway after her and closed it behind him in obedience to a gesture from Beverley.

"Please follow us, Mr. Pendleton," the ex-counterfeiter said, briefly, as, with his arm around Judith, he led her away, flashing a light from a pocket electric as he went.

After a little they descended a short spiral stairway, and, farther on, ascended a second one. "My hollow gate-posts and the connecting link between them," Beverley called back to Boone. Then, a moment or two later, they passed into the room where Vera had seated herself to await the return of her husband.

She sprang to her feet in amazement when she saw Judith and Boone were with him, but she came forward at once with both hands extended, her eyes shining, and her face suffused with the new joy that clamored inside of her.

Judith took her hands into her own. For a moment the two looked searchingly into one another's eyes. Then Judith released Vera's hands and opened her arms.

"Why, Vera!" she said. "You are—you are—you look just like the same Vera that I used to love. Oh, Vera, is it true? Are you that lost Vera, come back to us again?"

"Pendleton," Beverley was saying, while his wife

and sister were embracing and whispering together, "you love my little Nell-girl. You need not confess it; I know." He called to Judith: "Nell-girl, come here. Do you love this man?"

For answer Judith went straight to Boone, and he opened his arms and took her into them. She snuggled against him.

"I am glad—very glad," Beverley said, with quiet emphasis. "I know that you will make her very happy, Pendleton. Now, little girl, kiss me good-by. . . . And now go back to your friends. I will follow you and let you through the doors. You could not find the springs that operate them on this side of the gate."

"What are you going to do, Beverley? Where are you going?" Judith asked.

Instead of replying in words, he put a sealed envelope into her hands. Then he said:

"That will tell you. I want you to promise me that you will not open it until after all of the silly business at Washington is over and done with, and you and Boone are married, and have started away on your wedding tour. Will you do that?"

"Yes," she replied.

"Then, just one more promise—from both of you. I want you both to promise me that you will be married just as soon as that Washington business is settled, no matter what anybody says, or does, and no matter what happens. Kiss me, Nell-

girl, and promise. Give me your hand, Boone. Now, we will go back to the two operative-dromios. Selah! Come on."

Judith and Vera embraced once more; then they parted.

"I say, Beverley," Billy Cortright called out when Judith and Boone had returned, and Beverley was about to close the door upon them. "Fayban and I have decided that we are very tired. We are going to stay right here and count these bills, or pretend to, and it will take a long time to do that. Pendleton's car isn't working, and he doesn't want it or need it, I know. We are all going to sleep like dead men, to-night, and so——"

Beverley interrupted him with a light laugh.

"I understand, Billy," he said. "That is very kind of you. But I don't need the car, thank you just the same. Good-by, all of you . . . and . . . if I may say it . . . God bless you, each and all!" He was gone.

Half an hour later, Boone Pendleton, with his arm around Judith, followed by Fayban and Billy Cortright marching side by side and in silence, walked along the path from Uncle Zack's cabin, toward the house.

"So that is your idea, is it, Billy?" Fayban asked, just before they arrived at the steps of the piazza.

"Sure, Hoddie. Couldn't you tell that by the look of him? But he will do it in some easy and pain-

less manner. Never mind how. We could not have prevented it if we had tried, and—maybe it is best, after all. That hollow wall will be their tomb, and, as for me, I have already forgotten that it is hollow. Eh, Hoddie?”

“So have I, Billy. Let’s shake on that.”

CHAPTER XXXII

AT THE BUNGALOW

“JUDITH, sweetheart; come. We are back home. Back to the little bungalow where you came to me out of the rain, and wound yourself around my heart. Come, little wife. I will carry you up the steps and into the house, just as I did that other time when I brought you here.”

Boone had jumped from under the steering wheel of his roadster and was holding out his arms to her. She smiled happily into his eyes and submitted.

He took her into his arms and held her thus for a moment with his lips pressed fervently against the soft skin of her cheek which was flushed and glowing with the supreme happiness and content of that ecstatic moment; for they were just two hours married; only two hours before, they had heard the solemn words pronounced which made them man and wife—which had transformed Judith Ralston to Judith Pendleton—which had bestowed upon them those wonderful titles, Husband, Wife. The ceremony had been performed in the great drawing room of the big colonial mansion on the mountain-

side, eight miles away, which had been the Pendleton homestead throughout eight generations of Boone's ancestors, and which, God willing, might now continue to be so for as many more.

Both had agreed that there was only one place in all the world that could be "the perfect place" for their "perfect honeymoon"; the bungalow; and by themselves, without servants; situated exactly as they had been in the beginning of the development of their great love. And, oh, the joy of returning to it blessed by the new titles that each had bestowed upon the other. They were Mr. and Mrs. Boone Pendleton, if you please; and the magic in the mere thought of it was well nigh overwhelming.

So, holding Judith tightly clasped in his arms, Boone bore her up the steps to the wide verandah and put her down upon her feet, still retaining his clasp around her, still holding her.

Memory of that other time when he had carried her up those steps and put her down, insensible, and sodden and wet with the tempest that had buffeted them, was upon them both.

Then he had carried her across his shoulder like a bag of meal; and there had been no consciousness in her of what he was doing—no responsive thrill in her being, that answered to his touch when, presently, he had returned to her and borne her inside, and put her down in front of the blazing fire that he had started. It was there, in the bungalow,

where both of them had learned to know the full meaning of Love—and the blessed memory of it thrilled them in the moment of this transfigured homecoming. Then, also, both had been facing life's great problem—each one his own, and her own, and yet, each one the same one; for all of the diversified problems that man and woman are called upon to face and to solve, inevitably focus themselves into one—just one—the great problem of every young life—the Problem of the Future.

“Sweetheart,” Boone said in a low tone, holding her tightly against him, “do you remember—are you recalling, now, that other time when I brought you here, and carried you up these steps, and—and all—all about it, dear one?”

“Yes, Boone. I was thinking about—all of it. I did not know when you brought me up the steps. I was unconscious. But—yet—I seem to know all about that, too.”

“That afternoon, darling,” he went on after a moment, “when your horse ran away from you and left you to be overtaken by the storm—left you for me to find, by the roadside, wet, bedraggled, hopelessly crippled for the time being, but brave, and steadfast, and with an unfaltering courage—on that afternoon, Judith, you were fleeing from a problem which had proved too big for you to solve. You were seeking to escape from a condition that had become intolerable. Do you remember?”

"Yes, dear."

"Sweetheart, God, in His infinite wisdom, seemed to have abandoned you there, by the roadside; but He had already started me on the way to find you; and I did find you; and your problem was solved. We did not know it then, although we sensed it—we two, together. But, the solution of it began, then and there; and now——"

"Now, my husband, I am at peace; the Peace that passeth understanding."

They were silent for a space. They still clung together at the top of the steps, Boone holding Judith tightly against him, she with her arms around his neck. Never before had the whole world been so confidently happy, for their world was the whole world, just then.

"I, too, had my own problem, dear heart," he told her, presently.

"You?" Judith replied, smiling up at him.

"Yes. Compared to yours, it was as nothing, and yet, it seemed very great to me, just then."

"You? With a problem, Boone dear? I cannot imagine your having one. Since I have known your dear father and mother, since I have witnessed their adoration of you, since I have realized the vastness of this domain that will one day be yours, since I have been brought to an understanding of the great affection that even the negroes bestow upon you, and have given as bountifully to me because I am

your wife; since—since everything that has come to pass in our lives, dear, I cannot imagine you as having had a problem.” Judith shook her shapely head, and smiled into his eyes.

“Nevertheless I had one. A very small, tiny, wee-bit of a thing as compared to yours, but, apparently very big, very disconcerting, then, when I faced it. You will laugh aloud when you hear what it was. You will make fun of me, and guy me. You will say that I was stupid—I don’t know what you will say; only, I know that you will laugh.” He nodded his head with emphasis. Judith could see that he was making an effort to render his tone and manner solemn and convincing; but she could also detect the twinkle in his eyes when he added, sepulchrally: “It was because I had that big problem to face, sweetheart, that I fled from the city, and came down here to the bungalow without telling my father or my mother or anybody, of my intention. I came here in secret, unheralded, alone, to strive—in the solitude that I knew would be mine in this place—for a solution of my problem. And yonder, beyond the gate, I found you. And, lo! my problem was solved for me. You solved it for me when the rain dripped from the ends of your nose and chin. You solved it for me when I carried you through the mud to this bungalow. You solved it for me when you dressed yourself in some of my clothes and looked so funny that I had to laugh at

you. You solved it for me when you sat opposite me at the table, eating fried bacon, and you solved it all over again when you let me bandage your swollen ankle—and, darling, you solved it over and over and over again, every minute of every hour of every day that has come and gone since the instant I saw you, forlorn and sodden, by the roadside.”

“My goodness, Boone, what in the world was it?” Judith demanded, drawing away from his embrace.

“Will you promise not to laugh at me, if I tell you?”

“I’ll try not—although I do feel like laughing, already.”

“It was this: My graceless parents——”

“Hush! You must not say that, even in jest.”

“Well, then, my dearly beloved father and mother had been trying, for three years, to get me to marry somebody; and——”

“Oh!”

“You wait until I have finished. It is much more serious than you suppose. Will you hear me through to the end, without interruption?”

“Yes. I’ll—I’ll try, dear. Go on.”

“Why, when all is said, your problem was a joke, as compared to mine. You could skip out—fly the coop—skedaddle—beat it—disappear. I could not do any of those things. The colonel’s heart, and the mater’s, too, for that matter, would have been broken if I had jumped the traces; and they had

those same hearts set—set, mind you—on my getting married to somebody right off the reel. They had picked out two or three prospective wives, any one of whom would do—as far as they were concerned. They didn't seem to think that it made any difference to me. Well, away off there in the city, I had picked out two or three, also, and——”

“You—*had!*”

“Yes. You see. . . . Wait a minute; you said that you would not interrupt. You see, dear, I had practically promised the gov'nor, a year before, that by the time I showed up at home again (and I always come home in the summer) I would have picked out a wife, and been ready to introduce her as my fiancée. They were dead set on my having a—on keeping up the —Well, I am of the ninth generation of Pendletons that have called the old place Home. The colonel wants to feel some sort of assurance that there will be nine more generations to follow. Get me?”

Judith nodded, biting her lip.

“Well, don't you see what an awful problem I had to face, down here, all alone, in this bungalow? I had given my word—and there is a legend that no Pendleton ever breaks his word, once it is given. The year was up. I was due home, at the old place—and—*I had not picked out a wife.* Can you beat it? Wasn't I up against it? There were six names that I had selected to choose from, and I had

decided to write their names on slips of paper and——”

“Please stop, Boone.”

“Oh! all right. But—you talk about *your* problem? Think of mine.”

“Boone Pendleton, had you made love to all six of those girls?”

“Nope. Honest. I tried to, a lot of times, but—I couldn’t, somehow, make any of them think it was real. . . . Come, dear heart, let us go inside. I’ll fry some bacon for you, just as I did that other time.”

“Boone, dear?”

“Yes, sweetheart?”

“When did you know—How soon did you know—that I—that finding me as you did, had solved your problem for you?”

“When did I know? I knew it before I was born—only, of course, I didn’t *know* that I knew it. I had to find *you*, down there by the roadside, in order to *know* that I had always known it. Don’t you see, dear, that that was why I could not settle on any one of the six?”

Washington had accepted without question the reports made by Cortright and Fayban. The “department” entertained no lingering doubts concerning the sudden disappearance of Bud Beverley and his wife—or, if it did—if there existed a doubt in the minds of the chief or any of his operatives, no

mention whatever was made of the fact. The whole history of the Beverley case was put away in the pigeon-holes of memory, never to be withdrawn.

Judith had not been called upon to reply to a question. There had been no need. Beverley and his wife, Vera, had dropped off the earth—were believed by all to be sleeping peacefully, side by side, in their chosen tomb, within the hollow wall, at Dreamland.

It was more than an hour later, and twilight was upon the earth, when Boone and Judith again stood side by side at the top of the verandah steps.

Judith held a sealed envelope in one of her hands, partly concealed. After a time she lifted it and showed it to Boone.

"I—I am almost afraid to open it, Boone, dear," Judith murmured.

"Let me do it for you, sweetheart," he suggested; and she passed it into his hand, quickly.

Boone broke the seal, glanced at the contents—and broke into a ringing laugh.

"What a man!" he exclaimed. "What a man! Read it yourself, Judith. Read it aloud."

Judith took the letter, and read:

"Little Nell-girl:

"You will read this long after the trouble at Washington will have become a thing of the past—if there ever is any, which I very much doubt. I am

scribbling this while I await Vera; I have sent Phemie to bring her to me. I have turned good, little sister. I don't quite know how it happened—but it happened. Something inside of me broke, or quit, or changed—or something on top of me fell off, or flew off, or met sudden death. I have been asleep, and dreaming, and had a nightmare, and I have awakened. And, little sister, Vera will be even more glad than you to know that it is so. Vera is not what you have thought her to be, of late. Vera is Vera, and she has but one peephole into life, and that is through my eyes. If I have looked upon the seamy side of it, that has been her view. When I have lived around the swamps and the cesspools of evil things, Vera has lived there, too. Only in the privacy of our sometimes better thoughts has she begged me, time and time again, to do this thing that I have just done. An hour ago, little sister—no; it seems so, but it is only a few minutes ago—I stood beside the little desk where you are, this moment, engaged in showing the counterfeit plates to Fayban, and decided to get off the earth inside of a small tomb that I have fixed up, in the western end of the wall; and I intended to take Vera with me. But I have changed my mind. I am going to give all of you the impression that I have done that very thing—only I'm not going to do it.

“Wait until one year from to-day, Nell-girl, and then write a letter to Senor Benito Llorente de la

Vera, at Buenos Ayres, Argentina, and mark it 'transient.' Doubtless, in due time thereafter you will hear something about your brother and sister. I shall always love you, my little sister, and, hereafter, I shall keep myself worthy to be loved by my Nell-girl. So God bless you.

"BEVERLEY."

It was more than a month after that, when Boone and Judith were at the Willard, in Washington, that they sent word to Billy Cortright, and he responded within the hour that he received it.

It was after they had finished dinner, and were chatting happily, that Judith bent nearer to him, and said soberly:

"Billy"—even Judith had decided that "Mr." did not exactly fit him—"there is one thing that has been troubling me, and which I think I should tell you about. You know——"

"Wait a moment, Mrs.——"

"J-U-D-I-T-H, Judith," she corrected him.

"All right, Judith. Whatever it is, I don't want to know it. What I do want to know, is this: When are you two going to ask Fayban and me to the bungalow?"

"Right now, if you will go. We are going back to-morrow. Will you go? And can you answer for Mr. Fayban?"

"Sure, Mike!"

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"You will find two of your old acquaintances when you get there," Boone interposed.

"Will I? Who?"

"Uncle Zack, and Phemie," Judith answered.

"Well, well, well! You don't say. Anybody else?"

"Yes. One else." It was Judith again; and Boone listened smilingly, for he knew what was coming.

"Who else?" Billy asked.

"Love. Love is always there, Billy."

THE END

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